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Title	The Elysian: Creative responses
Publication date	2017
Original Citation	Allen, G. and Ramsey, B. (eds.) (2017) The Elysian: Creative Responses, Cork: J. O'Sullivan Publisher, New Binary Press. isbn: 978-0-9935803-5-2
Type of publication	Book
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Download date	2026-11-16 11:43:27
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/15890

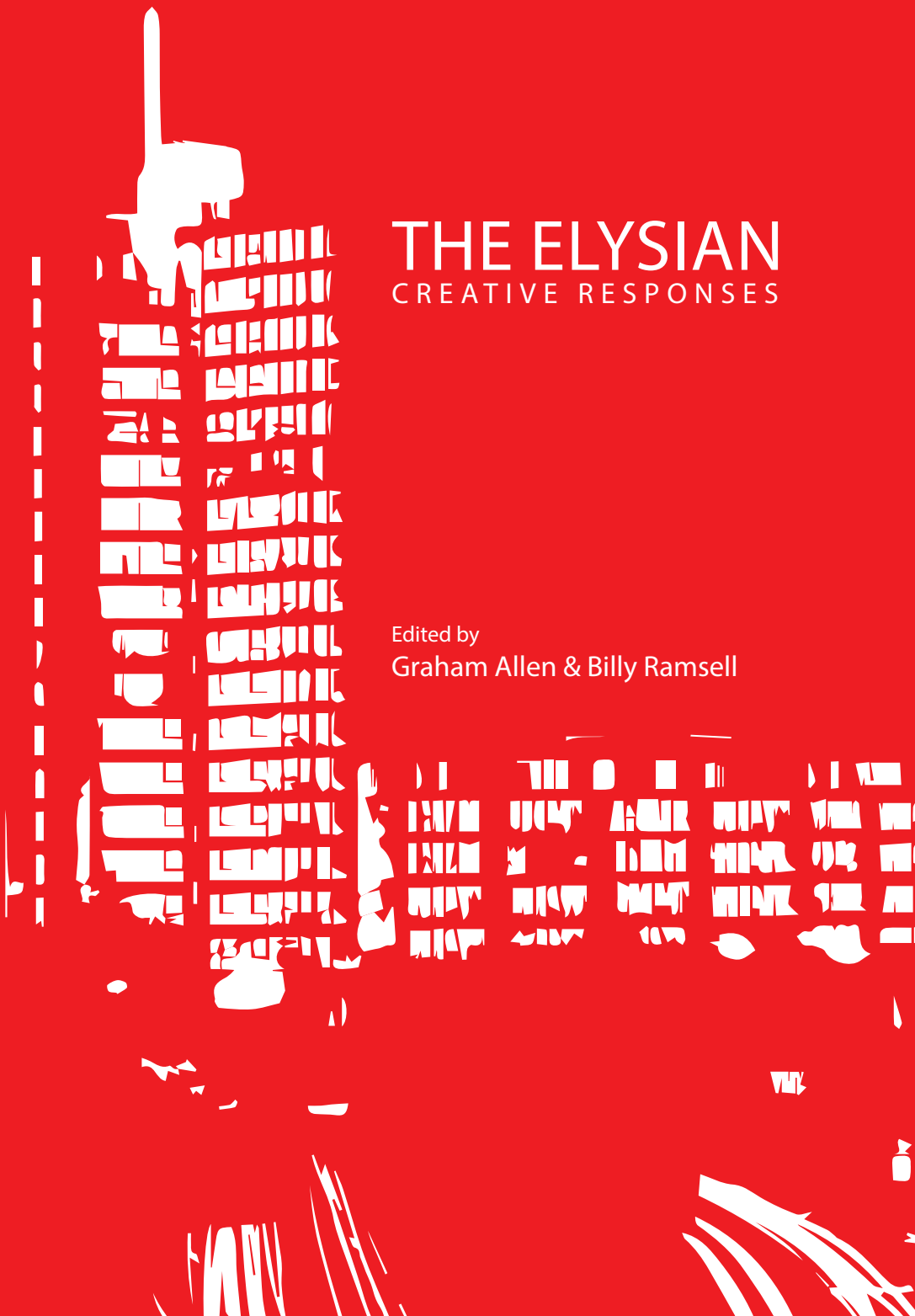
UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

THE ELYSIAN

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Edited by

Graham Allen & Billy Ramsell



The Elysian
Creative Responses

Edited by Graham Allen & Billy Ramsell

Published in 2017 by
New Binary Press
Cork city, Ireland

Founding Editor James O'Sullivan

NewBinaryPress.com

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ISBN 978-0-9935803-5-2

Printed in Cork by Lettertec

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Acknowledgments

Patrick Cotter's 'Elysian' was previously published in *Poetry Ireland Review* 110 and appears with the permission of the author.

Cónal Creedon's 'After the Ball' appears reprinted here with the permission of the author.

Paul Casey's "For Pointing at the Sun" is included in *Virtual Tides* (Salmon Poetry, 2016).

Mary Noonan's "Elysian" was published in *PN Review* 232 (2016).

All other texts are published for the first time.

We would like to thank UCC's Strategic Research Fund for a generous award towards the publication of this volume.

We would also like to thank Anne McShane, Sian Langley, Anne Fitzgerald and James O'Sullivan.

Introduction 1
Graham Allen & Billy Ramsell

Elevation 3
Denis Linehan

Elysian Thoughts 20
Thomas McCarthy

After the Ball 21
Cónal Creedon

Homework, 2055 31
Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Copper & Fudge 33
E. R. Murray

On Fairytale Vandalism 48
Kathy D'Arcy

Penthouse 50
Madeleine D'Arcy

Tommy Franklin 65
Conor J. McManus

Elysian 67
Patrick Cotter

Tóg 69
Julie Field

Folly 70
Mary Morrissy

The Chicago Syndrome 83
Frank McDonald

The Elysian, An Aggregate 89
Paul Hegarty

The Part 106
James Cummins

White Legs Disappearing 107
Cal Doyle

The Tower 108
Fergal Gaynor

Antigonal 112
Sarah Hayden

The Meat Queue 114
David Toms

Sole Occupant 115
Victoria Kennefick

'Raise hope, a range—' 117
Rachel Warriner

Safe as Houses 118
Susan Tomaselli

Túr na Baoise 128
Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh

"Skycrapers are Gay" 129
Jennifer Matthews

To the Last Drop 130
Billy O'Callaghan

Coaga Fís / Fifty Visions 141
Colm Ó Ceallacháin

For Pointing at the Sun 149
Paul Casey

Everything's New, Everything's Been Done 151
Joseph Horgan

Terminus 153
Danielle McLaughlin

Elysian 166
Mary Noonan

Perhaps… Afterwards 168
Kevin Griffin

The Cloud Architect 170
Matthew Geden

#1 Crush 171
Eimear Ryan

About the Editors 179

Notes on Contributors 181

Introduction

Graham Allen & Billy Ramsell

What you are about to read is but a snapshot in time, the record of a single moment in Cork's relationship with its tallest structure, a relationship that in the tower's relatively short life to date has already passed through several phases and will, no doubt, pass through several more as the Elyisan continues to look down, more or less benignly, over the city's denizens.

The poems, stories and essays gathered here capture a moment that even now is receding into the past. Like all texts, this collection reports on the landscape in the rear-view mirror even as it glimpses at the horizon speeding toward us.

When most of these pieces were written, the Elysian was barely illuminated. Currently, the lights are coming back on. Whether they stay on or not will be a subject for another day. Either way, the poets and storytellers of Cork will have something to say about the matter.

It is a rare occurrence for poets and writers to be consulted when the landscape of a city is changed. It is very common, however, for such alterations to be immortalised by these very artists. The imperative of this book is a simple one: the health of any town or city can be accurately gauged by the involvement of its artists in its representations. For good or bad, places need to see themselves refracted through the prism of its indigenous arts.

One of the book's notable features is the level of warmth its writers exhibit toward this much criticised building. What these pieces share is an insistence that we look, observe and respond. They tell stories about the tower and the imaginary people with which they inhabit it. They connect it to mythical and classical tropes. They ground it, ultimately, in the lived multiplicity of Cork City in 2017. After this collection, the building need not feel so lonely anymore.

The book's goal was to focus the attention of Cork's writers on a single unmoving symbol, to encourage an artistic circumnavigation of the building, one that imitates the physical

pedestrian reality now experienced by the city's inhabitants. This book is an exercise in culture, where culture is understood as the integration of the civic, artistic and political spheres. It is offered to its readers in the hope of a more integrated future.

Elevation

Denis Linehan

I.

From the very beginning the Elysian was devoted to the sky. Here was a skyscraper that announced it would alter the skyline, and become a new tower for seeing the city. Built at a cost of €150 million, the Elysian was conceived as a large, mixed use residential and retail development on Eglinton Street, located in the civic heart of the city and on the edge of its neglected docklands. The building originally aimed to supply 212 apartments, five retail outlets, seven offices and spaces for a gym and crèche. The contours of the Elysian's journey through the boom and bust of the Celtic Tiger are well known. It was granted planning permission in July 2005. It rose at a time of great optimism. It was completed in the middle of 2008 at the precipice of the economic crash. In the years that followed, it remained largely unoccupied. Its appeal to the city of Cork, as a beacon of confidence faded. To some it became a void in the sky. It's vacancy for some, is a symbol of shame, particularly as the intimate strains of a rental crisis and homelessness stalk the city.

Yet, unlike several other high-rise buildings raised in Ireland around the same time, the Elysian's completion saved it from ruination. The great grey concrete hulk of the abandoned headquarters of the Anglo Irish Bank in the Dublin docklands, or the long unfinished apartment blocks in Sandyford in South Dublin—over which were thrown huge weather proof canvases depicting fictional residents sunning themselves on balconies as a means to disguise the raw concrete shell underneath—ensured that high-rise ruins became potent symbols of the economic crash. The events that overtook the Elysian and buckled its image as a site for luxury living are ongoing. Shifts in the meanings around buildings are not unexpected, either about this particular tower, or those found elsewhere. Despite its mass, architecture is a volatile object. It is fabricated in culture and is often an expression of long held needs and desires. Its presences in places or on the horizon can

express deep wishes or nourish disappointment. It can gather up indefinite but recognizable sentiments, which can resolve a city's questions over its identity or conversely be magnetized to diverging world views and thrown into conflict with long-standing ways of valuing the city.

Without eliding these issues completely, in this essay I want to focus upon rich legacies related to culture, the sky and space at work in Cork that have shaped the form of the Elysian and its intercessions in the public imagination. In certain places—and Cork is one of those places—the cultural relationships found in architecture's relationship to its site, its topographical situation and its modifications of both the sky and skyline acquire significant power and significance. The potency of these conditions—the power of *genius loci*—demand careful observation (Norberg-Schulz). An examination of the contexts, decisions and aspirations of the tower even before the 2008 crash overtook it, reveal how these forces folded the tower into the landscape and into fields of meaning far subtler than the narratives about luxury living offered in its marketing. In taking its position against the sky, the Elysian took its place in a very distinctive culture of sight and elevation, and the intense cultural geographies of prospects, sights and memory that it disturbed.

The anthropologist Tim Ingold reminds us that from the earliest times, there has been a knotting together of earth and sky. High places, mounds and elevations have been invested with meaning and drama (Ingold, 2007). Drawing upon Heidegger, he notes that there is 'no life, in short, in a world where earth and sky do not mix and mingle' (Ingold, 2010). The skyline is an involved and entangled thing. Not only is it entwined with the landscape, architecture, infrastructure and light but it also encompasses all the aspirations, politics and hopes in between. The skyline is a great meeting place, bringing disparate elements together in lines of sight, prospects, views and panoramas, whose ownership is never entirely fixed. It is observed, contemplated and pictured—in glances, meditations, in photographs, sketches and poetry—making the skyline of the city one of its largest and most intricate public spaces. And also perhaps its most auratic, offering what Walter Benjamin

perceived as '…a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance' and its intercession with particular moments of contemplation and affect. The skyline is also both the most fleeting and greatest sign of a city's deep culture—an observation taken up by Michael Sorkin when he proclaims that the skyline of New York has been constructed '… in the image of a bar graph' (Sorkin, 22). Lingering on the eye, the skyline blends the intimate geographies of memory and place, with investment, branding, capital, planning, architecture and design. The world over, when they happen, debates about high-rise towers reveal elaborate and persistent questions about the sky, light, prospects and views which speak to engrained questions of culture, habitat, vision and identity, of what is profitable, what is sustainable and what is just. This sky-culture reveals that in spite of their hardness, cities are unfixed and porous urban spaces, which sparkle with possibilities and are experienced and shaped within the intersections of every human and natural thing. Sensitivity to the Elysian's location in this culture, yields insights into its production and its reception. Ultimately it might explain why the building—which in a larger city might offer a notable contribution to a district and then blend silently into the background—may be of lasting significance.

II.

As it rose, the Elysian seemed to manifest the regeneration potential of this area of the city, built originally to support port and manufacturing activities. In the years leading up to its construction, the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP) set out a framework for the regeneration of the Cork Docklands that drew upon models of waterfront development internationally. These propositions were rapidly taken up by commercial and political interests in the city who saw in this district possibilities for new office space, luxury apartments, spa hotels, concert venues and thousands of new housing units. This buoyancy about the future was reflected in the scheme prepared by Urban Design Consultants, who recast the docklands as a sequence of new neighbourhoods with an interconnected hierarchy of streets, laneways, squares and pocket

parks linked to a wide riverside promenade and a new canal system. Both the Cork Dockland Strategy and the construction of the Elysian captured the optimistic mood of these pre-crash times. Proposed as a 'landmark building,' the tower was situated at the end of the main road to the city from Cork Airport where it could claim a gateway position. It was raised during a sustained period of urban development in which up to ten towers where proposed across Cork. Scott Tallon Walker Architects in their scheme for the Cork South Docklands—known as the Atlantic Quarter—imagined a 'new waterside skyline … an attractive composition of office, hotel and residential buildings and a major new cultural and event destination in the form of the Cork Arena combining gallery, performance, and conference and exhibition space.'[i] Presented with these potential changes to the city, local newspapers evoked images of Manhattan, speculative skylines fueled by proposals for towers in the surrounding area, at Centre Park Road, Kennedy Road and The South Docks Quayside.

These proposals in Cork, reflected broader developments in Ireland, where at the beginning of the millennium it came about that the skyline became an increasingly important but also anxious space. In spite of the demolition of the first Irish tower-blocks built in Ireland in Ballymun at this time, and the complex failures this invoked, proposals for high-rise buildings was characteristic of urban development across Ireland. This was a time of landmarks, a fashion for statement buildings that haunts the architecture from this period, whose apartment complexes in particular spawned in their wake a whole new range of social problems and modes of living (Boyd). Two towers were finished in Limerick: the Riverpoint Tower and Clarion Hotel. There were dramatics proposals for Waterford and dozens of new towers were planned in Dublin, most along the quays and the Dublin Docklands, the most famous being the unbuilt U2 tower which had it been constructed would have housed a penthouse recording studio, with panoramic views over the city to the talismanic Sugarloaf mountain in Wicklow.

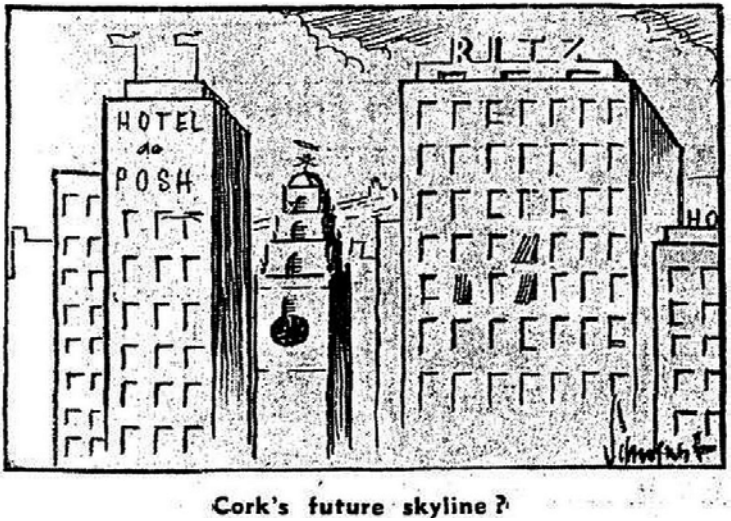
Skyscrapers offer opportunity for growth, but sit uncomfortably with the historical city, and often come into conflict with the intangible rights and amenity values to views and prospects

that can be claimed by the population. In 2004, groups protesting the development of a large hotel and apartment complex at Western Road in Cork that would block cherished views of William Burgess's gothic cathedral, pictured the town overtaken by tower-blocks, and invoked the comic book heroes Batman and Robin casting incredulous misgivings about the developments in the skyline.



'Kork City, 2015', reproduced with kind permission of Brendan Cotter and Café Paradiso.

Such anxieties run deep. In the early 1960s, as plans for the 17-storey County Hall designed by Patrick McSweeney went into circulation, the cartoonist for the *Cork Examiner* pictured the 18th century icon of Cork, St Anne's Shandon being overtaken by tower blocks, including a new glitzy Ritz Hotel.



'Cork's Future Skyline' The Cork Examiner, April 28th, 1962, reproduced with the kind permission of the Irish Examiner.

As new urban development began to peak during 2004, one letter writer in the *Irish Independent* pleaded with the people of Cork '… to open their eyes to the reality of the virtual destruction of our beautiful city. This destruction is the result of the greed of the so-called developers in our midst who can do as they wish without any apparent resistance from City Hall. When standing outside the main entrance to City Hall and looking across the river Lee it beggars belief that planning has been granted for the existing concrete mountains which were built right in the heart of the city' (Martin). In fact, the pace of new development prompted the City Council to develop a series of planning strategies which included a skyline policy, a landscape policy and a tall buildings policy. These reveal deep sensitivities to topography and culture that the Elysian's production and reception cannot escape. The tower was held in their orbit, circumscribed by their calculations, expectations and deep wishes.

III.

Topography is culture. David Leatherbarrow notes that '… topography incorporates terrain, built and unbuilt, but more than that, for it also includes practical affairs, or their traces, ranging from those that are typical to those that are extraordinary' (Leatherbarrow, 12). The topography of Cork city is defined within a definable landscape setting and offers what urban planners refer to as a distinctive visual envelope—a zone of uninterrupted views that creates distinguishable boundaries and helps makes the city legible. The contours and significance of this landscape has been recognised in topographies of the city for hundreds of years. Cork, its river, it harbour and its splendid view for one 19th century visitor 'will suggest numerous subjects for the pencil of the artist of landscape painting.' In 1944, the geographer Charles O Connell defined these ridges on the north as the Gurranebraher-Montenotte ridge and on the south as the Lehenagh ridge (O Connell 100-5). These ridges provide the backdrop to the city and are visible from multiple points. The City Council is clear that these views both of these elevations and the views from them provide amenity value—riches—to the population based generally upon their pleasantness, aesthetic coherence and cultural and recreational attributes. From a range of vantage points throughout the city, views of historical buildings, notably Saint Anne's Church in Shandon, St Finbarr's Cathedral, Holy Trinity Church and Blackrock Castle, have received special protection. These interventions formalize deeper social and cultural concerns about the skyline and its meaning.

While all of these are technical documents, they are driven by cultural and aesthetic values that have evolved over long periods of time. These texts must be read obliquely, to reveal and diffuse the cyphers they deploy to excise the communal and ambiguous urban mythology about the urban ecumene exercised but also evaded in the visible world. Sometimes, these categories cannot be gripped, only indicated with hesitant gestures. Within them, the skyline is conjured up, comes into focus, becoming a sequence of lines which planners and developers are obliged to conserve, edit and create as they consider new landmarks and buildings. The phrase currently

running though these policy documents is to 'conserve and enhance,' a delicate axiom with specific outcomes for how the fabric of the city is to be shaped. The City Council is busy editing and conserving this skyline, encouraging designs that act upon the roof-scape of new buildings and guiding architects to modify the scale, materials and style of their building to address the existing cityscape and the place of landmark buildings and views. The city skyline they say '… is a combination of elements: the general scale of buildings, streets and spaces from area to area, major landmarks on the skyline, other individual higher buildings, higher building groups and landscape elements' (Cork City Council, 240). Significantly, a key proposition underwriting these schemes is that the new structures should never break the silhouette provided by the city's ridges. The claim of the topographical is indelible, a claim found in the form and language of the Elysian.

The history of Cork is also a history of elevation. While the very name Cork, derived from the Gaelic word Corcaigh, interlaces its origins with the marsh upon which it was founded, it must be recalled that two towers dominate the city's coat of arms. In 1846, a landmark tower was raised by public subscription in honour of the social reformer Father Mathew in Glountane in the eastern districts beyond the city. This landmark, through its form and clear sight-lines, visibly relates to another tower at Blackrock, a point at which over hundreds of years the Lord Mayors cast a dart into the river to mark the city's boundaries. In the 1860's Callahan's tower was constructed off Barrack Street in the southern districts of the inner city. The tower became a site for flamboyance and carnival, sex and drama (Keohane). The sky occupies almost half of John Butts' *View of Cork* (1755) in which St Anne tower at Shandon appears, taller slimmer and more elevated, as do the Dutch style townhouses on the quays. As this perspective was represented later in the engraving created by Richard Watts for Charles Smith's *The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Cork* (1774)—a landscape illustration which folded neatly out of the book—the value of panoramic is telling, an image that offered the city up in one view, to be consumed at once by the eye.

This topographical culture invoked in its ridges, and it

histories has been long folded into the typology of Cork and the language of the city's architecture. Both the fabric of the built environment and its imagery, opens up insight into a culture that was topographically minded. A pair of Nathaniel Grogan paintings, *Boats on the River Lee below Tivoli* (1785) and *Gothic Temple Tivoli County Cork* (1785), are distinguished by the artful elaboration of views of Cork they represent. When Grogan painted his image of the Gothic Temple, now long destroyed, the principle figure in the painting was pointing towards the view, a gesture located in the body that traces the value of the picturesque in place, and in a topographical culture that haunts the city to this day.



'Nathaniel Grogan: Gothic Temple, Tivoli: Cork Children Playing', c 1785, reproduced with the kind permission of Dominic Daly.

The settlement of the ridges from Sundays Well in the west to Tivoli in the east first by grand houses and later by the terraces and town houses of the bourgeoisie, places a deep historical and cultural investment in elevation as a mode of living and a means of expressing social status in the city.

Streets on the northern ridge are stacked above one

another. Views, sight-lines and prospects orient the houses. The topographical impulses found in the individual house elements, the tall sash windows that milk light in the deepest winter, the balconies and the numerous roof lights from which to peer at the city, the river and vistas below. In the Georgian mansion Vernon Mount (1794) in Douglas, there is a remarkable testament to the depth of this culture—an oval lunette—a superb round window at the bottom of the mansion's staircase—with vistas over the estuary, down the River Lee and towards the open sea.



'Landscape's Eye, Oval window at Vernon Mount, Cork', reproduced with kind permission of the Irish Architectural Archive.

For it was not enough to build a villa but also to claim the view, a gift to be impressed upon guests as means to express one's civility and place in public life. In both the framing of the visible realm and in the patronage and emplacement of perspective, these windows operated in what Hannah Arendt has called 'the space of appearance,' the delicate manipulation of capital and power and place, so essential to the political negotiation of 18th century society. Through time, this culture persists. It informed the reception of the new County Hall built in the western suburbs in the late 1960s, whose title as the tallest building in the Republic of Ireland was only eclipsed by the Elysian. From the upper floors of this tower, it was claimed that people could see the source of the River Lee at Gougane Barra, the spiritual heartland of the city. In 2004, the east facing gallery windows of the Glucksmann Gallery designed by O'Donnell + Tuomey engaged comparable topographical instincts. Many of the picture windows here offer an ever changing prospect of the city that competes with the art inside, an affection for views this practice have repeated in their refurbishment of St Angela School on St Patricks Hill in 2015, itself a recognised viewing place in the city.

IV.

When Michael O'Flynn described The Elysian as 'a new quality landmark building which will define the Cork skyline for years to come' (Qtd. Examiner Nov 2008) and the billboards that surrounded the site declared 'a skyline defined,' he was doing more than marketing his tower, he was claiming an inheritance over the sky, prospect and views. It is in this urban culture that the Elysian makes its place. This is a speculative building of course, but one with its feet in the very fabric of the city, its topography and its eye. The building occupies an entire block. The design created by Wilson Architects is at once conventional, but also responsive in its detail. The sleek and urbane style that characterises the build seemed appointed to appeal to the aspirational ambition of the upwardly mobile residents it sought to attract. Two towers—one very tall—were appointed around a central circulation core, filled by a private

podium garden elaborated with sculpture and water features. The street line on eastern side of Albert Street has been undulated, balconies recessed inwards and the building appears to lightly fold itself away from the busy traffic. The elevation on the western side of the building deploys a double height and offers a continuous open, accessible largely glass frontage. In the as yet unnamed passage between the Elysian and One Albert Quay, the architect broke the building into four distinct elements, to create a greater sense of place, the most elaborate element of which is the lesser tower, clad in deep velvet-red tiles. From here, people who pass through can glance upwards through the building, and sense trees, garden and courtyards above. More recently, in 2015, all these elements have been reflected in the black glass glazing of One Albert Quay, reflections that offer atmospheric counterpoints to the views of the rooftops of the docklands to the east and the intimacy of peeks and glimpses into the offices in the City Hall to the west.

The most striking element of the building, and the part with which it is most clearly identified, is the 17-storey tower at the southwestern corner. Perhaps, just perhaps, in this tower there are faint echoes of the triangular glass street corner found in Mies van der Rohe's proposition for a skyscraper on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin (1921), an intervention that floats in the subconscious of modernist architecture. It could be said with slightly more certainly, that a more recognisable inspiration was Frank Lloyd Wright's Golden Beacon, his prototypical skyscraper for Broadacre City (1929), a design which he manifested in the Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. At 68.3 meters, it is the highest residential tower in the Republic of Ireland. In 2016, as the tower is prepared by its new owners—Carbon Finance, a subsidiary of the international equity firm Blackstone—for an eventual sale, its position above Cork and its place in the skyline remain central to its meaning. To some degree, the legacies of prestige and heritage invested for generations in the culture of elevation, now cascades value through the entity that owns the tower, folding capital both into the landscape and into the abstract forms of money that sustains the financial products managed by these equity funds: 'The Elysian stands like a beacon above the city' declares the tower website. 'By day it reflects the sun

and sky, by night it twinkles with a myriad of lights.'[ii] To enhance these claims, the website puts its elevation in motion using software that provides a virtual 360 panorama of views from the tower. In doing so the current representations of the tower capture much of the intention of the many reviews of the tower in the local press. 'The stunning vistas of Cork City, from this 17-storey tower, have no peers. There are eye-popping views, to all points of the compass from the balconies—across the River Lee, the docklands, the western suburbs, the lower harbour and thousands of houses dotted into the distance, like Lego' (Daly 31). Another, reporting on the lavish launch of the tower in 2008 by various sports stars and politicians, marvelled that '… visitors were treated to a view of the city normally only seen by crane operators or steeple jacks. The entire city boundary was in view from that height and the Garda cars far below at the rear of Anglesea Street looked like toy cars' (Healy).

However as tall as it is, this tower has been held down. The Irish American architect Louis Sullivan, who decorated his towers in Chicago with ornamental panels inspired by Celtic symbols, declared that skyscrapers should be '…every inch a proud and soaring thing, rising in sheer exultation that from bottom to top is a unit without a single dissenting line' (Sullivan). But the Elysian does not soar, because it cannot. The topographical imperative holds it down. It is this logos of city and sky, landmarks and views, prospects and culture that occupied both the developer, the architects and the city planners, revealing the sky as a negotiated territory within which the design and orientation of the tower was managed. The land, in other words had to be written into the tower. It is for this reason, that when travelling on the overpass over the Kinsale roundabout near the southern boundary of the city, one can claim a little epiphany, for in the distance, the Elysian dips underneath the silhouette of the northern ridge. And it is for this reason, that when it came to plan the kitchens of the penthouses in the tower, the landscape arose again when the interior designer Rose McGowan chose the high gloss solid surface Parapan whose '...sharp reflective features created a fantastic feature within the penthouses where views of the city are clearly reflected back to the kitchen doors' (Bayliss 23-4).

These design imperatives have a subtle relationship in the urban landscape, in which it plays an unexpected game of hide and seek. From Penrose Quay, it moves in and out of view. From the Blackrock Road, it looms above the Victorian townhouses. When driving into the city from the Dublin road along the quays, it competes squarely with cranes on the docks as they dip into the deep cargo holds of ships, and is masked almost entirely by the monumental R & H Hall grain silo. From here, once it appears, its profile can momentarily acquire the shape of a ship. In the form that the tower took, sensitivities to the sky and the topographical are reflected in its slenderness and in the disaggregated form that defines the tower into several vertical planes. These design strategies deploy a sequence of occasional protrusions, and tapered angles that together dissolve the tower's mass and height. These animate its appearance under different conditions of shade and light. Such sensitivities to the building's situation is reflected in the synthetic granite panels that appeal to the granite facade of many of the public buildings of nineteenth-century city, whilst the bright red facade of the smaller tower, and side of the building facing west, surely evokes the old red sandstone that abounds in the city's buildings and walls, from which it is said the colours of Cork GAA jersey originates. If one felt inclined to stand and notice, the tower responds quietly to the distribution of cloud overhead and the fall of light upon the city. In contrast to the total black and reflective glass coat of the neighbouring building, One Albert Quay, which can occasionally bounce the sun's glare back into the street, the Elysian tower facilitates a more mutable relationship to the weather, the seasons, and in a more abstract sense to the geometries of earth and sun. In this scheme, the tall and continuous glass wedge that expresses most effectively the drama of the tower is key. It makes part of the building translucent. It allows extra light to enter the apartments inside. It generates panoramic views. It refracts the sun setting in the west. It makes the building glow.

Meanwhile, under guidance again from the City Council and their concerns for the skyline, the roofline of the tower is animated by small glass pavilions and patios. On the top of the tower, the plant room for the lifts is wrapped in a curved structure that in

bright sunshine and when wet appears to shine in light gold. Wilson Architects completed this elaborate composition and homage to the sky with a 10-metre spire. When illuminated—in glamorous cobalt blues, hot pinks and reds, a drama in light that can extend from the top of this spire to the street—it claims to act as a landmark appear complete. These illuminations, trade enchantment and delight with other bodies of light in the city, such as the uncanny green water tower at the top of Knocknaheeny on the northern ridge and remind us that that this part of the city is long associated with spectacle. On the site of City Hall, a large and celebrated exhibition was held in 1852 and when the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland came to open it, they named the street upon which the Elysian now sits after him. Concerts, shows, public meetings have been staged here ever since. This is a place-memory taken up in the City Hall extension designed by Ahrends Burton Koralek which includes an energetic coloured LED lighting system that lights this glass block up like fairy-art. Yet, as night falls, the eye on the street lingers on the life in the few occupied apartments in the glass walls of the Elysian, illuminated domestically, offering insight into ways of living: things inside, shadows moving about, chairs, bicycles, children's toys, a life lived enclosed, but in the open. In the sky.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Gary Boyd, Cian O Callaghan and Charles Watkins for their insights and commentary on this essay.

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Elysian Thoughts

Thomas McCarthy

My fingers are running through these fields of barley,
Though it's metal barley, heavy metal barley, and
The heads of barley are made of gold. A riverside sand
Of 22-carat, at least, would make a less agile corpse weary,
But I am made for finer thoughts, for gossamer wings;
And plodding in this eternal designers' graveyard
Is no bother to an Architect. From this glinting sward
I can see that building in the distance. Ah, it sings
For me in storied glory over a plain of flooded gombeens,
Their brains subject to constant flooding from the sea—
We were waiting for the Chinese to come, for Shanghai on the Lee,
But instead of duck-dressers I now see gobblers of limp drisheen.
They live on lack again. They love it. Here I am in a marsh with
All the other demons, watching the return of the second-rate.

After the Ball

Cónal Creedon

Author's Commentary

It's a city of steps and steeples, more steps and steep hills, and above the heads of the merchant paupers and princes, the goldie fish on Shandon casts a sceptical eye over a canopy of slate clad buckled beams and cracked chimney pots that stretches right across the goldfish bowl that I call home.

We didn't call it the inner city, it was just plain downtown. Home for me was a spaghetti bowl of streets centring on three points corner, where Devonshire Street, Leitrim Street and Coburg Street melt into one. My family has lived and traded here for generations. Ours was a busy little shop more social than commercial, and bivouacked in various nooks and crannies throughout the house could be found: my parents, 12 siblings, a clatter of pets and a string of guests who came to dinner and stayed.

Outside the streets were bustling too, with families talking and taking air; shawl wrapped Annie selling apples from her barrow on Carroll's Quay, Connie the Donkey hawking saw-dust for soakage to the O'Connells who butchered beef, the O'Sullivans who cured bacon and the Johnsons who served the creamiest pints this side of the river. Each morning we'd wake to a dawn chorus of the men from Blackpool and the Red City of Gurranabraher, walking and whistling their way along our street and all the way down to the docks and the Motown of Fords and Dunlop. It was a bit like living in a musical, but that was a long time ago, thirty, forty years ago, or so—it was a time when people were buttoned-up in the days before Velcro.

Without a blade of grass downtown, street soccer evolved into a sport with rules and regulations all of its own. And with no set time limit, games stretched to infinity—one lasted right through the summer of '72 from June to September, with the final tally on the score sheet recording a decisive victory—674 goals to 453.

You'd find us there, every day after school, gangs of downtown dirty-faced boys, girls, cats and dogs, chasing like

coursing greyhounds an inflated pig's-bladder up and down the street; toddlers tackled teenagers, and the dogs of the street waited in the wings to score on the rebound. Shep Dorney, a bow-legged, black and tan terrier, will always be remembered, for a dazzling equalizer he once scored – enough to put Miah Dennehy in the shade.

We were the last of the downtown dirty-faces, and in time, we surrendered our sovereignty of the streets, when flesh and bone gave way to rubber and steel, and a school boy's skull was crushed beneath the wheels of a truck. Soon after that the families moved out; out of the heart of the city, out to the Corporation reservations in the wastelands. Ironically, where once the downtown dirty-faces held sway, now stands a multi-story car-park, keeping the machine safe from people…

Death may be life's only certainty, but we had seen the writing on the wall. Ever since the tower blocks, built decades earlier, had cleared the inner-city slums and tenements, we knew that change was on the way. Dublin had Ballymun, Belfast had the Divis Flats, while here in Cork we had the flats in Blackpool. These towers of Babel were seen as a simple solution to a complex problem, but by the late 1970s the Utopic dream became a living nightmare of social depravation for families forced to live in those cubicles in the sky. Eventually common sense prevailed, and the towers were torn down, and good riddance to them.

Fast forward thirty years, to a time when the Celtic Tiger stalked the land. It was a time when the privileged few flaunted vulgar excess. They shamelessly dipped their snouts in the trough, and when they had eaten more than their fill, they belched and walked away to let the impoverished masses pick up the tab. It was a time when our leaders got drunk on power and gave away the family silver to the lowest bidder. It was a time of fact-finding junkets to exotic destinations, limos in gridlock and helicopters filled the sky weaving in and out between the forest of construction cranes—it was a time when many stretched beyond their limits to get a foot onto the first rung of the property ladder, seduced by the perversion of property porn.

Just as the tower blocks of the 1960s were the epitome of depression and cold-war austerity, the erection of the phallic-Elysian

with its claim to be the tallest building in Ireland is a celebration of Celtic Tiger excess. Once again cubicles in the sky were back in vogue, these high-spec, high-tec, high-rise pods were custom-built and designed to entice those wealthy enough, back into the heart of the city with a promise of bars and restaurants, and the cappuccino life-style of the quintessential downtown experience.

The Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel [Genesis: 11–9], tells us that a stairway to heaven should honour the gods not the builders, but more importantly it is a tale that comes with the apocalyptic warning that monoculturalism is the rock upon which all human culture will perish.

It seems to me that the pulse of downtown's beating-heart is found in that elusive sense of neighbourhood, where diversity is the oxygen that fuels the flames beneath the melting pot of human aspirations, ambitions and dreams. This is a world where the street is an extension of the home, and tolerance for all class, creed and culture is fundamental to those who wish to share this communal space—downtown is like a fine Persian rug; the vibrancy of the tapestry is measured in the complexity of the weave.

Just as the construction of the Elysian Tower is a milestone on the timeline of this city—so too, my story, 'After the Ball', marks a turning point in the life-cycle of my street. I hope, I am mistaken, but somehow I think street soccer is a thing of the past. Yet still to this very day, sometimes when I'm heading down along Pine Street, I swear I can still hear in my mind's inner ear, the shrieks of downtown dirty-faced delight, as a shower of sparks from quarter-iron tipped heels, send a pig skin squealing, rip-roaring, like a rocket, rattling the back of the onion sack—shuddering waves along the steel sheeting of Smyth's Store's gate.

'After The Ball' is from the early 1990s, and was first published in my collection of short stories, Pancho and Lefty Ride Out, published by The Collins Press in 1995. It was subsequently broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1. This story represents my first attempt at writing fiction, and is probably my most autobiographical piece of fiction to date. This story gained recognition in the George A Birmingham Awards, The Francis McManus Awards and The Life Extra Awards.

Down our street change comes slowly, so slow it's undetectable, undetectable like aging, yet inevitable. Some things never change, as usual there's Jojo Duggan standing at the far side of our shop counter, snatching a free read of the death notices in the Echo before heading home for his tea.

Traffic is thick, spluttering out heavy metals that make their way up to the first floor windows and stick like tar. Through my shop window, I see faces frustrated by small-town grid-lock.

—Busy out there? says I, in the hope of conversation.

—Nothing new about that, he mutters. Devonshire Street was ass to nose with ox in Viking times...

Outside a driver abandons his car. Hazards flashing, he makes a beeline for the shop.

—Tinkle-tinkle-tinkle…

The doorbell announces his entry. His eyes scour the cigarette shelf.

—Fags! A pack of them there! he points.

It crosses my mind that here's a man who has been battling with quitting cigarettes and I'm witnessing his most recent breakout.

—Shockin' out there, says I being sociable.

—Shockin'? It's dia-fuckin-bolical!

—This street is always diabolical, mumbles Jojo.

—Bloody bottleneck!

He fumbles a cigarette from packet to mouth, while ranting on about two lanes coming into three, and the cursed plague of 4X4s, or something like that. I take his money, and say thanks.

—Tinkle-tinkle-tinkle…

The shop door closes behind him.

Traffic has moved a couple of feet up the street. Horns honk, fists flake the air, the cigarette smoker slips into his car apologetically, drives that couple of feet and stops—still going nowhere, just ticking over. It crosses my mind that maybe—maybe this street was ass to nose with ox in Viking times but it wasn't always that way. So, I turn to Jojo, and say,

—Would you believe that we played eight-a-side soccer up and down that street without interference from the traffic, and that wasn't the dark ages?

—Well ya wouldn't play pitch-and-toss out there now, says he.

And with a flick of his wrists he's trawling through the small adds.

I make my way towards the window and look out on the madness. Maybe it's the curse of middle age, but for some reason through the car exhaust and dusky haze, I'm transported to another time, a time when coal-smoke filled the air; short pants, chestnuts, dogs and balls of string. It was a long time ago: thirty, forty years ago, or so, a time when we were buttoned up, in the days before Velcro…

*

It's said there's no life without light, well down our street there was no light without life; even the dullest of street lamps had a cluster of people, they chatted, they sang, they shouted, they fought, they made love and then they'd go home.

And every day after school, you'd find us there, the downtown dirty-faces, gathered like moths to a flame, funting a ball up and down the street, shouting, roaring and red-faced.

The stretch of citystreet between the old bakery and the gate next to my father's shop was our stadium, and with every goal, foul or near miss, the roar of the crowd echoing inside our heads would erupt,

—Oooooaugh!

to the sound of the Kop, North Bank or Stretford End…

It's about a quarter past four, coal smoke fills the air, sky dark, street dimly lit. The clock is ticking and it's getting late. I stand up from the kerb, and threatening to go home, I say,

—Someone call over to Georgie's house and get the ball!

—There's no way his Mam will give out the ball without Georgie.

—Well, someone call over to the house and get Georgie, so, says I.

—Hang on! I think I sees him!

—There he is!

—That's him!

And there's Georgie, turning the corner of Brewery Lane, ball under his arm. Trailing behind him is his small brother Paudie.

—Hoi, Georgie!

—Come on!

—Kick the ball!

Georgie walks out onto the street and raises his finger in the air as if judging the wind direction. In one slick swoop, the ball slips from under his arm onto his outstretched left hand. His pace quickening to a trot, ball drops and without missing a beat he gives it a lash. Like a rocket it vanishes into the darkness way above the street lamp.

—On the head!

—Lay it on!

—Chip it in!

A quick tap around, the teams picked and the game is on…

*

There was uneven number of us out that evening, and so, as usual, Georgie's small brother Paudie was the floater. As a floater, his job was to even the odds, and in the event of a goal, he had to endure the indignity of changing sides to play for the losing team. It was pathetic to see him turn around and play for the losing side while his ex-team mates jumped and howled to the roar of the crowd. What a way to start life, always on the losing side, always the reject, that was small Paudie, a born loser. Night after night, he would spend the whole game running his little heart out without even as much as a smell of the ball. Except when it went wide and ended up miles off down the street, small Paudie was always the one who'd run after it.

*

…it's coming towards the Angelus, the score 14-All. Our mothers are on the street, calling for us to come in for our tea. It is time to call it a night. Up goes the shout.

—Next goal wins!

The rule is on. The ball is out. The pressure is off. All men forward. Both sides playing attacking defense. And after twenty-eight goals rip-roaring and rattling the back of the onion sack, the next goal is the only goal that matters.

A quick break. A clatter of sparks from quarter-irons. Roaring. Backward running. Shirt tugging. Shoving. A rocket sends the pigskin squealing two inches wide of the post, bringing the Stretford End to their toes…

—Oooouagh!

Ball is out. A long clearance sends it high and to the left, drawing the midfield to the wing, opening a gap in the hole. Georgie makes a break, he plays the ball off the high footpath, then weaves inside a parked Morris Minor. He beats one. Beats two. He shoots. Keeper is sent full stretch to keep it out of the net, then lofts it down to the halfway line. It's intercepted, sent back in. Picked up by Georgie. Georgie's on the ball, the world is at his feet and he's thundering down the wing. Small Paudie is at the far side of the goal mouth.

—George! Pass the ball! Georgie! Pass the ball, Georgie! To me…! To me…

Georgie sees his kid brother waving frantically and calling for the ball. But small Paudie has two left feet. So, in that split of a second, Georgie, the glory hunter, decides to go it alone.

He swerves left, swerves right, beats his man and has a crack. Ball screws off his boot, clips the footpath, spins in the air and bounces out wide. Keeper leaves it off. The Kop, in full voice chant its frustration,

—Georgie Worst, Super Spa!

He walks like a woman,

And he wears a bra!

From nowhere comes small Paudie, his little legs like

pistons, knees pumping under short pants. His right foot reaches out awkwardly, left shin draws blood as it scrapes along the road. Ball connects with Paudie's ankle. It rebounds off the kerb and bounces…

Paudie tumbles over, flat on his face with the sheer momentum of his effort. The ball bounces, spins and bounces again. Keeper is caught flat-footed. He can do nothing but watch as the ball bounces just beyond his reach and into the goal.

—Goal! Goal! Goal!

It echoes across the street, from gate to gate and all around the stadium. And the Kop in all its glory is on fire,

—Give him a ball and a yard of grass,

Paudie'll leave you on yer ass!

Paudie's eyes are bulging in his head. Stretched out, there in the middle of the street, he raises his arms above his head in a V for victory.

Paudie is on his feet. He makes a dash inside the keeper, picks up the ball and shakes a fist of defiance to the invisible crowd behind the goal. They are calling out his name,

—Nice one, Paudie! Nice one, son!

Nice one Paudie! Let's have another one!

He jumps in the air, shaking his little clenched fist. This is Paudie's night, his moment of glory. Georgie runs up behind his baby brother and rubs his feather-like hair with a father-like pride...

—Dowcha, Paudie boy!

Small Paudie is peaking. Not only has he scored the winning goal. But the game is over. He can't be sent to the losing team to even the odds. Paudie has won the game. He will remember this goal for the rest of his living days, but right now all he wants to do is to get home and tell his Dad of his moment of glory.

—Dowcha Paudie, boy! Georgie says it again.

—Sorted Georgie! Sorted!

Paudie gives a thumbs up and he's off on a lap of honour.

—Three foot-two, eyes of blue,

Paudie Buckley's after you,

and we love him,

we love him,

we do…

*

The scream of screeching brakes seemed to stretch to an eternity, we just stood there rooted to the spot, crippled by terror, helplessly, hopelessly, horrified as two tons of rubber and steel just chewed up small Paudie, splattering concrete and tarmac with blood and guts, crushing schoolboy skull and bones to asphalt…

Georgie cradled his baby brother's mangled body until the ambulance men prised the little corpse from his arms. Kneeling there in the middle of the street, Georgie wept.

He was never the same after that. Nothing was ever the same after that. I have vague memories of neighbours on the street with prayers and tears. I didn't understand the meaning of a closed casket funeral, but I never saw Paudie again. Paudie the floater was gone.

Not long after that, Georgie's family moved out of our street, the rest were soon to follow. Of all the lads who played ball that evening only one remains living on my street and that's me.

Sometimes, when I think of that night, I strain my brain to remember all their names, and though the memory of some names has faded, yet the image of each and every one of their dirty faces is etched indelibly in my mind. It's a night I remember vividly.

It was the night we lost the game. It was the night street soccer became a thing of the past, the night that small Paudie died.

*

It's dusky outside. Traffic has moved a few more feet up the street. Jojo folds the newspaper as neat as he can and places it back under the bundle on the counter. It's almost six o'clock, he's heading home to catch the news on the telly.

—I was just reading there, says he. The Council are going to pedestrianise this street.

—This street? says I.

—That's right, says Jojo. By all accounts, they want to attract families back to live in the inner city, he says.

—The inner city? says I, and I throw my eyes to heaven.

—Well that's what it says in the paper, says Jojo.

And as Jojo spouts some gobbledegook about inner city rejuvenation it crosses my mind that the people who live here never call it the inner city, it was always just plain downtown. And when I hear of planners and developers using words like inner city and rejuvenation in the same breath, it usually means a wrecking-ball can't be far behind…

—Rejuvenation, Jojo stumbles over the word. It'd be nice wouldn't it? he says.

—It'd be nice to have the place pedestrianized…

I'm tempted to say that this street was pedestrianised long before there was traffic on it, but I just don't have the heart or the head-space to get into all that. So I just say,

—Yer right, Jojo. It'd be lovely. A few flower pots and benches, that sort of thing…

Jojo shoves his lunchbox inside his coat and heads off into the dark; home to his gas coal effect fire and telly. I watch him cross the street, weave in and out through the traffic and pass over beyond the lane where Georgie used to live.

As I stand here looking out on the madness of ass to nose cross-town traffic, my mind wonders to all those who went before. Most have moved out of the heart of the city, to the Corporation reservations on the Northside. I think of the downtown dirty-faces now long gone, never to return. I think of Georgie, and I wonder how he's getting on…

I remember the night small Paudie died. It was the night street soccer became a thing of the past; it was the night the traffic won the game and the heart of a city stopped beating.

Homework, 2055

Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Q.5b Ask a grandparent to describe the aftermath of Ireland's economic crash. Write their answer below and draw a suitable image in the box provided.

Yes, I'll remember for you. After the collapse,
nothing fell, there was no war; it all just stopped.
We did nothing. Well, that's not really true—
we did most of what we used to do, but blurred—

we were a city on pause. And we all, well,
we all waited then, to see what might happen—
we waited and watched the things we'd been told
to desire grow tarnished and old. By night

the cranes had disappeared. Houses were boarded
mid-build. The grand Elysian turned a shrug—
just another block of flats where seagulls squealed
and shat all over its self-cleaning glass.

That year, a friend finished a degree in art.
The Developers, she said, had allowed her
college to borrow the Elysian's basement
as a temporary gallery, and so, we stood

in the unfinished cellar of that dark-
windowed tower, under floors
and floors of empty homes,
with a group of strangers

all wincing at wine, all smiling red-stained
teeth at sculptures, installations, paintings.
Again and again, I was drawn back
to one vast canvas tacked to a breeze-block wall,

in which two tangled figures
lifted their heads to peer
back at me, as though waiting
for me to see

something, their faces faceless.
Lip-less, they could not tell us
what to say or think.
And that's it, that's all

I recall of 2009, that basement,
the crowd circling that pair
of painted faces, those gaping, empty
ovals, gazing back at me, gazing and waiting.

Copper & Fudge

E. R. Murray

I'm hunting out a spot for begging when I spy a spillage of rust-red in the doorway of Dunnes, glinting bright as sunbeams. The shock of colour turns out to be curls, with limbs and a body attached. Must be a girl with such glorious hair.

One of the shop staff has the girl spotted, and I can tell from the way he's biting his lip, hesitating, that he's not sure whether it's the guards he should call, or shop security. So I cross the road. After all, she's one of us.

Turns out she's lying in a puddle of her own piss, so it's hardly your usual Romeo and Juliet stuff, but jeezus when I roll her over to see if she's still breathing and see those freckles, the touch of ruby in her lips, I could die with longing, despite the smell of drink coming off her.

I give her a shake and she opens her eyes. Misty lakes, they are, and her hair, the colour of pennies, tumbling across her face. I'm new to the city, but she must be newer still. Cork's no bigger than my hometown; I'd have noticed her for sure if our paths had crossed.

'You alright?' I ask.

Her voice like bells as she murmurs something indiscernible and I lean in.

'Got any smokes?'

I don't. But that doesn't stop a lad from trying.

'Come on, come with me,' I say, attempting to pull her to her feet.

'What about drink? Do you have some drink?'

'No.'

'Then piss off.'

'You can't stay here,' I say.

'Why not?'

'People can't get into the shop. They'll move you on. Or arrest you.'

'People? Fuck people!'

She struggles to stand, but manages it, all legs and

stumbling. Flicks her middle fingers and does a gyration, the crotch of her jeans showing damp and soggy. She doesn't care that it's daylight, the sun winking at her, like a brazen spotlight on where she's pissed her pants. She shoves her fingers into the face of a woman trying to pass by into Dunnes without meeting her eye, without seeing her at all, like she's a ghost or something.

When the woman finally acknowledges her, the girl says, 'What you looking at?'

Her voice is drooling and thick, still drunk and not yet her own. The snobby cow trying to push past acts as though she can't understand the words fired at her. And I can't help the anger that rises, screaming inside me like one of the gulls that guard the River Lee.

'Yeah, what you looking at?' I shout.

Giving people the finger in broad daylight in the doorway of Dunnes, it feels like I almost give a shit. Like I can almost fly.

Then I am, I'm fecking flying when the girl grabs me and we do an old-fashioned dance, arms locked and bodies pushed up close together, right in front of the automatic doors, making them swish open and shut like sighs. It's a pity we don't have a phone to film ourselves. We could go viral.

The security guard eventually arrives, crumbs round his mouth. His radio crackles like a perfect drumbeat, so we do a few more steps.

'I don't recognise you,' the security guard says to me, straightening up. 'But I never forget a face. You got that?'

I dip my head as he turns to the girl.

'As for you,' he lowers his voice to a whisper. 'You'd better watch yourself. You know what your Mam's like—she'll go mad if she finds out you're hanging around with young fellas from the streets.'

Instead of replying, the girl grabs my hand and pulls me away from our shop-front dance floor and cuts into a side street. Me, stumbling behind, thinking of bacon and cheese sambos in nice crusty bread, and trying to ignore the nagging worry in my gut that I didn't hide my sleeping bag well enough. What if it's gone when I get back? Da always says my single talent is messing things up. I consider doing the sensible thing and leaving to check on my gear,

but up ahead the girl's hair bounces, catching the sunlight in its twists as she runs—I'm surprised she can run at all with so much drink in her—and I wonder what it would be like to touch the tips of my fingers to those curls.

We don't stop until the bustle of St Patrick's Street is way behind us. Our hands separate when we reach the Post Office, leaning over and heaving for breath. As her fingers pull away from mine, I feel like getting sick. I expect her to feck off, but instead she holds her hand out towards me.

'Copper,' she says.

'What?'

'My name.'

She doesn't need to add the reason why, not in this sunshine. I fight the urge to reach out and twist her hair around my fingers. Instead, I take her offered hand and clench it in mine, hoping she doesn't notice the sweat. I'd murder a can right now. Or a naggin.

'Fudge,' I say.

When she repeats my name, I sound like boiled sweets in her mouth.

'Copper and Fudge, I like that,' she says, letting her hand drop. 'We sound like superheroes.' Then she scratches herself, must notice the dampness because she looks down and says 'Oh well, better mine than someone else's.'

And I laugh at that, even though it's not funny. Not really. And I suddenly want to make the world nicer for her.

'Come with me,' I say.

This time she doesn't tell me to piss off. And she's the one that follows.

I lead her to the wooden walkway outside that posh hotel, the one with the outdoor café, so we can stretch in the sun like cats and let her dry out.

Her legs look longer when she stretches them away from the bench, the once-white rubber nub on the end of her fake All-Stars pointing towards the river.

'It's like resting on a cloud,' she says, closing her eyes. 'Don't you think?'

I close my eyes but it's nothing like lying on a cloud 'cos all

my energy goes into stopping myself from getting a hard on, up close to her like that.

'Yeah, all fluffy and that,' I say.

Then she's asleep and she rolls onto me, her head resting in the crook of my collarbone. Her hand strokes my ribs before falling into my lap. I hardly dare breathe, and I'm hoping I don't stink too bad. The sky clouds over, as though answering, and I feel my mood plummet. Yeah, a naggin would be deadly right now.

We stay like that for hours, with her snoring and snuggling in until she's laid across my legs, face up to mine. I wonder if she's my girl now. Whether the bit of dribble that's escaped her mouth and trickled down onto my jeans has joined us in some special way. Whether she'll come to my spot tonight, snuggle down in my sleeping bag; the zippers gone so it'll be easy to share. That's if it's still there.

*

Copper only wakes when the rain starts belting down. The raindrops magnify a freckle on her lip and I'm so entranced, I don't realise she's opened her eyes until her face snaps into a massive grin.

She says, 'Caught ya.'

'Caught me what?'

'Being in love with me.'

'I am like fuck.' I say, standing up and shaking her off like an unwanted creepy crawly. I yank my hood up. 'Jesus, we'll be drenched.'

'You have somewhere?' she asks.

'Somewhere?'

'For when it's raining.'

She reaches out to catch the raindrops, like they're lovely and worth enjoying. I put my palms out too, trying not to think about my sleeping bag getting drowned wet.

'No.'

'Oh.'

'Do you?'

She doesn't answer. Purposefully avoids my gaze and scowls at the river, staring off into some secret place no one else will

ever reach. By the look on her face, the clouds passing over it, I don't think I'd like to go there anyway.

Copper looks back towards where we came from, then stares right at me, as though she can see the way my soul works. I'm not sure whether the wet on her face is raindrops or tears. Then, linking my arm, she hugs into me, as though I have warmth to offer in these tired bones, and we start to walk. The only person who ever held onto me like this was my Ma, and only when she wanted to win me round to her and Da's way of thinking. Like the time she convinced me to take the higher levels in my Leaving Cert. The Leaving Cert I failed. Cutting off any chances of Art College stone dead; any chance of them ever being proud of me stone dead. I check Copper's face to see if I can find an ulterior motive. She's pure and fresh as the rain that's washing us down and I conclude she just likes hugging—but that doesn't mean she fancies me.

'Shouldn't we find shelter?' I ask.

'Walking will keep us occupied,' she says.

'You don't wanna find a doorway?'

'You're gas,' she giggles and ruffles my hair.

So I concentrate on walking, one foot in front of the other, and being gas and not slipping. Into puddles, into the rain, into her—though that would be nice. It's been a while. No one wants to come near a lad who hasn't washed in weeks. Or is it almost a month? I try to measure the days but it's a blur of begging, drinking, having a toke, begging, drinking. It's not like that for everyone—for many, it's much worse—but as my Da would say, that's my broken record just now. Scritch. Scritch. Scritch. Getting wasted is the only way to forget.

'If you were a super hero, what would your superpower be?' I ask.

'Invisibility,' she says. 'What about you?'

'I'd fly,' I say. I've been invisible long enough.

'But people would shoot you down or lock you up for being mad. If you're invisible, no one would know what you're up to, so you'd be as free as a bird.'

'What's the point of being a bird without flying?'

'What's the point of being a bird in a cage?' she replies, and she's got me there.

I huddle into myself, and she smiles right at me. I feel something inside me unfurl, just a little.

We cross the river, away from the centre, and it's further than I've ever ventured in this direction since I arrived in Cork, so my legs start feeling like I'm walking on a bouncy castle.

'You alright?' Copper asks.

'Sure.'

'Really? You need a hit?'

"What do you mean?'

'Junk. Brown. You use it, right?'

I pause, not knowing what answer she wants. I don't want to mess it up by being a wimp. Don't want to seem more boy than man.

'I dunno…'

'Dunno if you use it, or if you need some?'

'I dunno.'

'Fudge. If we're gonna be superheroes, we gotta be straight with each other.'

'Why? You got some?' I say, trying to buy time.

I have the urge to yank Copper's coat up her arms, make sure she's stayed away from the junk. But that's not gentlemanly. I had a drag once, but it made me sick. I usually stick to weed. But to stay close to that shining hair, I could be convinced.

'No. But I could get you some.' She stops, kisses me full on the mouth, the raindrops slipping in between our lips so she tastes like shandy. 'It'll get us out of the rain for a while too.'

She points to this massive tower of glass and concrete up ahead. Pigeons wing their way past, not even trying to land there. If I was a pigeon, I'd find myself a small gutter to nest in, a roof at the back of a house that's nice and low. A spot that no one would notice where I could tuck out of the wind without fear of being dislodged.

'We're going in there? It looks a bit fancy.'

Copper winks.

As we get near, I stare at the gated car park. It'd be a deadly spot for tonight if no one moves us on. It's barred, so partly open, but the rain would only stretch so far. I look up to the top, and it seems like the sleek tower is starting to topple.

'Tallest building in Ireland,' says Copper.

The place is like a castle; it's magnificent. Full of secrets and worlds I'll never know, impossible to penetrate. If I had a place like this, would my Da be proud of me then? I shade my eyes and peer in to the reception area; sleek black tiles and marble counter tops. That'd be up my Da's street all right. I notice the man behind the desk, pretending not to watch us.

'Let's go in,' says Copper.

'We can't,' I say.

'Why not? We're superheroes, aren't we?'

She reaches for the door, but of course it's locked, so she rattles it and rattles it, trying to get the man's attention.

'When my Dad worked here,' she said. 'He used to let me in, no problem.'

'Your Da?'

'Yeah. He's not here now, but he'll be back soon. They'll be begging him to have his job back.'

'Is he working away?'

'Something like that. Left just after my little sister was born. Couldn't handle my Mam any more. Said he'd come back for us someday.'

I think about my Da. The lectures and rules. The brooding judgement and the way he'd close the doors too gently. Those tight-lipped silences that said I'd never, ever be good enough. As Copper raps her knuckles against the glass again, my heart starts doing flips. We're upsetting the man behind the desk. The way he stares too hard at something to ignore our existence—just like my old man. Determined not to look up.

'We're hungry,' shouts Copper, and I realise it's true; I'm bloody starving. 'We're just kids. Won't you help us out? A room for the night, maybe? I heard there's plenty spare.'

'How long have you been on the streets?' I say, thinking she's mad gullible and that it makes her kinda lovely. Not hard-faced like the others I've met; the ones I hope I don't turn into if this living on the streets thing turns permanent. Take Manny, for instance; he says he's been through more shit than any man should have to encounter, so it's no wonder he's sour. Says I'm too sweet for the streets, I should go back home. That's how I got my name.

Fudge: melt in the mouth like a mammy's boy. Only this mammy's boy got well away, didn't he? Fucked up my future by failing my Leaving Cert, then fucked off.

'Who says I'm on the streets?' she says, and I'm letting her words sink in as she raps her knuckles against the glass door and swears.

'C'mon, Mikey. For feck's sake.'

All the while, she's holding a smile on her face, and still the man pretends we're invisible. It's like there's a shield between his world and ours.

'Looks like my invisibility superpower is kicking in a bit too well,' says Copper. Then she tries knocking one last time.

The man lumbers out of his seat and comes to the door, yanking it open.

'Have you heard from my Dad, Mikey?

'Sorry, Copper,' says the man, shaking his head. 'Not a word.'

'So you're not out of a job yet then?'

The man chuckles. 'You're a right one. How's your Mam?'

He might as well as have slapped her across the face. Copper stiffens and looks to her toes, stubbing them on the ground.

'Ah, you know…'

'Hmm. You alright for food and that?'

'We're getting by.'

Sighing, Mikey hands over a few coins and Copper pulls me away, yanking me down and along a labyrinth of streets until we reach a chipper with a green sign: Lennox's. She buys three bags of wrapped chips and the salt and vinegar on them sets my mouth watering. I'm hoping she opens them up, but instead she hugs them to her body.

'These smell bloody gorgeous, don't they?' says Copper.

'Don't they just? Are we gonna eat them or just carry them?'

'Hang on a minute. They'll get ruined in the rain. I know a place we can go.'

I follow her and the lovely warm smell. We're laughing like crazy, at the thought of the cheek of us. Somewhere nearby, bells chime, and I realise I should be securing my spot. My legs start

giving up on me. I keep looking round, trying to get my bearings so I can find my way back to the centre of the city tonight. Every time I spot it, the tall spike of building stares back like a judgement.

Eventually, we stop at a yellow door and Copper pulls out a key.

'You're really not on the streets?' I say.

'If only,' she says, her hand shaking. 'Stupid lock's always a nightmare.' When the door finally opens, she takes a deep breath. 'Wait here a minute.'

Closing the door behind her, she leaves me in the rain with the faint smell of salt and vinegar still stinging my nostrils. Just as I start worrying she's ditched me, the door opens. 'Come on, it's clear. But we don't have much time.'

The door scuffs against the floor and sticks with a gentle thump, like a loaf of bread falling to the ground. When we push our way in I see why; cardboard boxes line the floor instead of carpet. The place is full of dirty washing and bin bags, and it smells of ashtrays and sour milk.

'Nice squat,' I say, eyeing up a box I can take with me when the other squatters get back later and tell me to shove off away from their girl.

Copper raises an eyebrow.

'It wasn't like this when Dad was here,' she says. 'Back then, we had thick carpet and it smelled of spice and washing powder and cake.' Then she calls out a name I don't recognise. 'Ellie… Ellie?'

I follow Copper to the sofa that's buried under clothes. She's still calling the name and I half expect a dog to come leaping out from somewhere.

'If you live here,' I say, 'What were you doing asleep in the doorway of bloody Dunnes?'

She looks at me queer, so much sadness swimming in her eyes, and I wish I could take the words back. I should ask her what makes her hurt so badly, but how do you put something like that into a sentence?

'Lucky bitch!' I add, because the air needed to be filled with something and that was the best I could come up with.

'Hungry?' she asks, unwrapping the bags of chips, her head cocked to one side like she's listening for something important.

I nod, resisting the urge to rip open the bag and stuff the whole lot down my throat. But then I hear whimpering. It comes from the corner of the room. Copper follows my gaze, then curses under her breath as she hands me a bag of steaming hot chips.

'It's OK, Ellie, it's just me,' she says.

The whimpering stops. A little girl with coin-coloured hair crawls out from under what must be a table. She toddles her way through the bin bags towards us. No clothes, but a nappy so ripe it can't have been changed for days, and her face tear-stained and bruised.

'Come here, princess,' says Copper, and scoops the girl up. 'Mama left you alone again, did she? Don't worry, I'm here now.'

She grabs up a handful of chips.

'Tuck in,' she says. 'I'll just sort this one out.'

Copper disappears off to change her sister's nappy, and when she returns, the toddler is freshly washed and in a little pink dress with only one stain on it. She trots over to me and gurgles something, so we share some chips. Copper has changed too and smells like soap and hairspray. Checking the time, she snatches up Ellie and points at the food.

'Let's finish these in my room,' she says, her voice a bit shaky. 'Just in case.'

The bedroom is girlish and messy, filled with pointless stuff that no one needs but everyone wants. Magazines, clothes everywhere and a big poster of a castle—it's just like I remember my own room. Only the posters were of girls and cars.

'This is in England,' says Copper, pointing to her castle. 'It's Ellie's rightful home, isn't that right, princess? I'm going to take you there one day. Touch the cold stone walls.'

Ellie nods. In front of the castle is a moat, and in it, two swans. I trace my fingers over them.

'Did you know that swans mate for life?' says Copper as I stuff chips into my mouth. 'But when it comes to being parents, they're crap. One day, they just fly off, without telling their cygnets where they're going.'

I lean in to the poster, trying to make sense of the turrets and jagged edges, the endless wedges of grey stone. I check out of the window—I'm not sure why, just used to being on that side of

the glass, I suppose. A pale light streams in and warms my face. In the distance, I see the tallest building in Ireland watching me back.

'We've got our own castle, right here,' I say.

'Too modern,' she says, 'Ellie's has been standing for hundreds of years. It's seen wars and heartache and a million heroes. What's that one ever going to see?'

'I dunno, it's not that bad,' I say.

I don't add, 'with you.'

'Isn't it? I reckon it's gone to the dogs since my Dad's stopped looking after it.'

Then she silences the conversation by handing me some junk and all the stuff to go with it. I don't really know what to do with it, so I just stare at it in my palm.

'You want me to do it for you?' she asks, and I shrug.

Don't want to fuck things up now.

I expect her to roll a smoke, but she ties something around my arm instead and starts smacking at it. Ellie fiddles with some foil.

'Copper, wait,' I say as she brings the needle close.

'Don't worry, I won't make a mistake.'

'No, it's just… I don't. Use it, like.'

She smiles, moves the stuff to the bedside table, and rolls a joint instead. A few tokes in and I'm the happiest I've ever been. I lay down and let the warmth wash over me. Copper curls into me, and Ellie into her, and we're almost a family. I always wanted a brother or sister; but my mother wasn't good at carrying children, and I was the only one that didn't die. I knew that every time my father looked at me, that's what he saw.

'I wish I could be like you, Fudge. It must be deadly being homeless.'

I don't really understand what she means. I'm just enjoying the buzz of the noise she makes, the gurgle of Ellie; being here like this is beautiful, like a night sky full of stars.

'You could take us away from here. Away from Mam.'

Copper could be a special constellation, or one of the planets. Maybe Mars, because it's bright red and flaming, just like the imprint of her face on my eyelids when I blink.

'We could go somewhere else. I could get money—all the money we needed. I know where Mam hides her stash. But I can't

do it alone.'

'Shh,' I manage - a gentle hiss through slack teeth, the sound of a comet falling.

'I left just after my Dad. I tried… But my Mam found me and... She took it out on Ellie.'

She cuddles in closer and kisses my cheek.

'But I won't let that happen again, will I darling girl? Next time, we'll visit the castle.'

I'm thinking how nice she sounds when the front door slams. Copper tenses, and Ellie leaps off the bed and shuffles underneath it, fast as a whippet.

There's the sound of footsteps, and a distant wail, like an injured dog.

'Shit,' whispers Copper, jumping up.

I don't know why, but my heart is thumping. Ellie starts whimpering under the bed and I want to help her, but I don't know how. Copper's bedroom door flings open, and there's a thin, straggly woman in the doorway—her hair is the same colour as her daughter's only it's limp and unwashed, threaded with grey. The woman lunges at Copper, yanks her hair and flings her across the room.

'Leave her alone,' I shout, getting to my feet, but my body won't work how I want it to, my legs slow and heavy like I'm caught in a bog.

Something hits my head hard, making stars as my skin turns cold and trickling. Copper's Ma looms over me, her face pocked and vicious. Copper leaps up and claws at her Ma, but the woman grabs her hair and belts her around the face. As Copper falls, her Ma grabs me by the scruff of my hoodie and drags me through the flat.

'Who the fuck are you, taking my stash?' she screams, pulling me along.

Before I can explain we didn't touch it, she punches me in the mouth, pushes me outside, and slams the door. My mouth oozes blood and red droplets hit the floor. I hear screams and sobbing, and I bang on the door until the sides of my curled fists bruise.

*

It's getting late when Copper's Ma leaves the flat. It's a good ten minutes before I dare cross the street and give the door a knock. When there's no reply, I bend down and push the letterbox open with my fingers.

'It's only me. Copper, open up.'

There's a shuffling noise and a faint whimper.

'Ellie, is that you? It's me, Fudge. Your sister's friend.'

Silence.

'Is Copper all right?'

'I'm here,' says Copper. 'I'm… We're all right.'

'Are you coming out?'

'I can't.'

'You can. Get that money you were talking about. Come with me.'

The lock clicks, and the door cracks open. Copper peers out, just one eye.

'It's OK, I saw her head that way. But we'd better move quick.'

'I can't. Look at the state of me.'

She pushes the door wide. Her beautiful hair is jagged and shorn on one side, a single long plait trailing the other shoulder.

'What the fuck?'

'See? I can't go out like this.'

I wedge my foot in the door so she can't close it.

'Why not? You look lovely to me,' I say. 'Doesn't your sister look like a princess, Ellie?'

The little girl looks up at me, her face a smudge of dirt and tears.

'It'll grow back,' I say. 'Get your things.'

'I'll be quick,' she says and runs back into the flat, Ellie wailing as she follows behind her. When Copper returns with a plastic bag of clothes, I take a step towards her and hold out my hand.

She takes it.

We coax Ellie out into the street and I lift her into her sister's arms. As I check that the coast is clear, Copper stumbles. I

catch them both and we slam the door shut, then run with all our might.

*

The air grows colder as we watch the sun go down, back on the benches near the posh hotel. Copper wraps her sister inside her jacket, bounces her on her knee facing the river, so she can see the gulls. The little girl is silent. Her eyes watchful, but her face deadpan.

'What'll we do?' asks Copper, in an overly cheery voice, so Ellie doesn't pick up on her worry.

'You got an address for your Da?' I ask.

She shakes her head.

'But you got a name, right? We could use the internet and…'

'I tried. Tried everything. He doesn't want to be found.'

'You can't go back there,' I say.

'What about your parents?'

Squinting over the water, I consider the possibility of home. Compared to Copper's life, my parents are peachy. But would we be welcome?

'I don't think we can.'

She doesn't ask questions, probably assuming my home's as bad as hers, and the chips in my stomach churn.

'Do you have a place here then?' she asks.

One plait dangles across her shoulder. It looks sad and lonely without the other.

'Kind of,' I say, wracking my brains to figure out what spots in the city will still be free. 'But your Ma will come looking for us. We'll have to leave tomorrow. Dublin, maybe. Or Galway. Don't worry, I'll look after you.'

Ellie cuddles into Copper's lap, and gives the tiniest smile I've ever seen as her eyes flicker towards the river. A shadow covers us, just briefly, and wing beats fill the air. Two white swans land in the water, making waves dance around their feathered bodies as they put on their brakes and slow. Copper lays her head on my shoulder, and I bury my nose in her hair, tucking Ellie in close. Inhaling

deeply, we watch the swans lift their wings into heart shapes and turn their backs to the city.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

On Fairytale Vandalism

Kathy D'Arcy

I am dressed as a merman
because no-one listens to mermaids

and also because there were stick-on sideburns
in the market jokeshop that I needed a reason to wear

since I will never grow my own and get to stride around
in them with my shirt half-open like Uncle Tom

when he came home from England back when
he had legs and a passport and could;

another element of my disguise
(since it's better to do these things in disguise)

is a gold and blue fishtail dress (African
cut) made for me in Jirapa in 2 days for 2 dollars

by a tailor who measured me
outside in the yard with the pan on the fire

and the sun and the men at the weights and the music,
running her tape on my fat white breasts and ass

while I looked in the door of her house
so as not to catch any of the men's eyes

and it was one room the size of a double bed.
And dressed like this I imagine myself scaling the Elysian

as mermen will once the extra metre of floodwater per square foot
of new building predicted by my friends in the ecology department
comes in

(my friends leaning into their boxes of gritty organic vegetables
from local allotments with long, celeriac-tinted faces)

but in reality all I do is climb (I have not yet lost my legs)
up the small ladder from the van and write (I have not yet lost

my voice) on the billboard around the corner that says
'CORK: A SKYLINE DEFINED,'

replacing simply one 'N' with an 'L' before returning
to a nearby gathering of sullen ecologists;

in the morning when I come back
with a smooth face and a camera

it's blank (another element
of my disguise is a trident).

Penthouse

Madeleine D'Arcy

Victor walked unsteadily down the steps of the plane, into a torrent of rain. *I should have remembered it always fucking rains in Cork,* he thought, as he lurched towards the terminal, squinting through his rain-drenched Raybans.

Through the door marked 'WELCOME TO CORK,' Victor gasped and blinked, shaking the rain off his leather jacket. His jeans felt damp and tight and he wondered if they could possibly have shrunk. He took his Raybans off and wiped them on his t-shirt but when he put them on again everything still seemed blurred. Never mind; he had a pair of lighter shades in his suitcase.

Advance upstairs. Passport Control. *No queue, thank fuck.* The passengers ahead of him were already bustling through. The security guy gave him a friendly smile, took a cursory look at his passport and waved him on. *A change from the good old days and the suspicious glares,* thought Victor. This guy seemed more like a representative of Bord Fáilte than an immigration officer.

It was many years since Victor had flown into Cork and during that time a brand-new airport terminal had been built to replace the old one. Victor felt oddly disappointed that the imitation fireplace was no longer there to greet him in the baggage retrieval area; that hokey old fireplace with its low unreal flames, below a 'Céad Míle Fáilte' sign in flummering script. He remembered a time when he and the lads had come back from London like conquering heroes for an Irish tour, after their first big break and signing with a major label. Wrecked from all the drink, plus cocaine snorted hastily before the flight, they had hung around at the fireplace while the tour manager waited for their multiple pieces of luggage—bags of leads and microphones, drums in flight cases, guitars. At first the fireplace became the focus of their piss-taking; then, to the horror of most of the unwilling audience, they'd begun to wail a made-up version of 'Come all ye maidens young and fair' that was pure filth. *Come and come again and take it in the mouth. Let me at that maidenhead.* What a fucking laugh. They almost got arrested.

As Victor moved away from where he thought the fireplace should be, a hefty woman in a flowered plastic raincoat turned to look at him. Dyed brown hair with a line of dirty grey showing at the parting, murky makeup on a bloated face, recognition dawning.

Oh Jesus, he thought, dementedly. *Do I know that woman?* Vague inkling. A fat girl with bad skin and plaits, huge tits. Musk oil and availability oozing from her. Majella Lane, the Entertainments Officer in UCC back in the day. She'd put Gog's Evil Design on in the college bar, what, 30 years ago or more? He'd shagged her a few times to land that first ever gig, and left at the end of the night with someone else.

Desperate for an escape, he looked around and saw the toilet doors marked 'Mná' and 'Fir' and 'Disabled.' He dodged off; badly needed a piss anyway, after all that vodka on the plane. *Ah urine streaming out feeling better now wash hands maybe brush my teeth ah feck the washbag's in the fucking suitcase no worries the good thing about vodka is you can't really smell it anyway.* He remembered he'd turned his phone to 'silent' on the plane so he took it out and checked it. One text. It was from Rourke.

I'm going to be late. Traffic bad. I'll be there as soon as possible. Sincere apologies.

So formal. Still, it was only to be expected. When his son got to know him better he'd chill out.

Peering out of the gents, he saw the baggage carousel judder into action and crank up. A bulging orange rucksack jiggered helplessly at the brink of the void before dropping onto the moving rubber belt. More suitcases and holdalls—mainly black and grey—toppled after it and shivered along.

Majella lunged forward and heaved a strangulated brown suitcase off the circling belt. She looked around as if in search of Victor so he ducked back into the Gents. *This is silly,* he thought. He washed his hands again, before walking out in what he hoped was a nonchalant, casual way, just in time to see Majella's rear view as she trundled her brown suitcase off towards the green 'Nothing to Declare' zone. *All clear. Safe to approach.*

Not many people were waiting for their luggage now. A

young woman in jeans, wearing a baby in a purple sling, stood next to him. She stared, hawk-eyed, at the moving carousel.

'You'd think they'd get their asses in gear,' she said. 'I thought they'd be out straight away with my pushchair.'

Finally, only one small black bag remained, going round and round until a young man appeared to retrieve it. No sign of Victor's suitcase. *Ah feck.*

The tannoy announced the arrival of a flight from Manchester. More passengers traipsed into the baggage hall and a neighbouring carousel began to turn.

Only Victor and the young woman with the baby still waited anxiously at the first—by now completely barren—baggage carousel. From its purple pouch, the baby stared lugubriously at Victor, who had an urge to stick his tongue out, but it looked like a baby that might cry and Victor, who had an aversion to babies in general, could tolerate crying babies even less.

'If they've lost the baby's buggy I'll go mental,' said the young woman.

Just then, Victor's suitcase thurrumped onto the carousel; a battered limegreen Samsonite plastered with raddled travel stickers from long-forgotten tours. Suddenly, joyously, Victor guessed his luggage had been searched for drugs. The powers-that-be had recognised him: the punk who knocked the plaster head off a Virgin Mary statue on The Late Late Show in 1985; the notorious rocker who had had a major hit single back in the day (well, number 4 in Ireland and number 29 in the UK). Home sweet home.

Outside the airport, the rain had stopped and a weak sun shone through the clouds like a scene of resurrection in Victor's old primary school catechism. The air smelt of wet grass and petrol and cigarettes; the tobacco smell emanating from a couple of young lads who loitered, smoking roll-ups, beneath the red and white no smoking sign on the wall.

Rourke had said he'd be driving a black Audi, and every time a black car drove through the yellow barrier Victor felt nervous, since he had no idea what an Audi looked like. He didn't drive. No need in London, he told people, but truth to tell he'd

been too wasted to learn to drive when he had had the money for a car. He'd always been scared of driving anyway since his old man had tried to teach him long ago—back in Ballincollig when he was seventeen—and made him feel like a useless piece of shit.

The young lads looked to be in their late teens and seemed to be in the midst of a quietly intense argument, occasionally glancing over at Victor in a way that unnerved him. The red-haired lad wore a denim jacket and the other, thin-faced and pale, wore a zipped-up grey hoodie. They both wore shellsuit pants that looked as if they were made of plastic. *A right pair of gurriers*, thought Victor. *Gurriers. Knackers. Norries. Langers. Toerags.* They were probably discussing how to mug him. He should not have worn his leather jacket.

The lads moved a few cautious paces closer and Victor was about to run, when the red-haired lad looked directly at him. 'Em, just want to say there, we love your music like. I mean, *Elevator Lust*, that was a magic album, man.'

'Fucking brilliant, it was,' said the other, looking at the ground. 'Mighty.'

'Thanks lads,' said Victor. He felt almost guilty now, for thinking the lads were low-lifes. He'd been called a gurrier more than once himself when he was their age.

'Sorry to bother you, like, only we're huge fans… I'm Nazz, by the way.' The red-haired lad stretched out his hand awkwardly and Victor shook it. 'He's Bunny.'

Bunny smiled shyly from underneath his hood, and for a brief moment, his upper row of teeth protruded, rabbit-like.

'Thing is, we're the Jupiter Scumbags and we're doing a gig in Cork tonight,' said Nazz. 'Any chance you'd come? We can put you on the guest list, buy you a pint, whatever.'

'Yeah,' said Bunny.

'Maybe you could do a bit of jamming with us? It'd be fucken amazeballs,' said Nazz. 'You got a flier, Bunny?'

Bunny took a crumpled flier out of his pocket, straightened it out and handed it to Victor.

'We're on at ten. Going to be a great night,' said Nazz.

Victor held the wrinkled piece of paper a short distance from his face but he could read no more than the words in large

type—'Cypress Avenue'—and he didn't want to hold it out and peer at it from arm's length, like an old fucker. 'Ah sorry lads. I'm only here for a family thing.'

'Pity,' said Nazz. 'We just thought we'd chance asking you, seeing as you're here. What you up to these days Victor?'

'As a matter of fact, I'm working on a rock opera,' said Victor. 'It's about the rise and fall and rise again of a charismatic…'

'Where the fuck were you?' demanded a female voice from a distance. A magnificent, curvaceous young woman in biker jacket and jeans stood several yards away. Her raven-black hair was streaked with metallic blue, shaved above her ears and long at the back. From that distance, Victor could make out the words emblazoned on her t-shirt:

JESUS LOVES YOU
EVERYONE ELSE THINKS YOU'RE AN ARSEHOLE

'Great t-shirt,' Victor said, as she approached.

'Lena, can you believe it? Victor Hussey.'

'The Gogs, right?' she said, almost callously.

'Yeah,' said Victor.

'My sister Lena,' Nazz explained. 'Just flown in from Manchester. She's our backing vocalist.' He turned to Lena. 'We invited him to the gig but he can't make it.'

'Pity,' she said.

'Well, we'd better head off,' said Nazz. 'Fucking great to meet you, Victor.'

As they turned to leave, Victor found he didn't want them to go. 'Hang on lads, have ye got a demo?' he asked.

'We've stuff up on YouTube—we could send you the links.'

'What's the name of your band again?'

'The Jupiter Scumbags.'

'Wait a minute. I'm going to ring my manager.' Victor nodded importantly, tapped his phone a few times and held it to his ear.

'Hey Quentin, the eagle has landed,' he said.

'Victor. What do you want? If it's about that rock opera thing…'

'No, no, that's all in hand. Listen. I've just come across a

young Cork band called the Jupiter Scumbags.'

'And?'

'You got to check them out. They'll send you their demo.'

'I told you before Victor. Quit wasting my time.'

'So you can expect to hear from them. Email or whatever.' Victor nodded confidently at the lads.

'Whatever.'

'You'll check it out when it arrives?'

'No.'

'Excellent,' said Victor and ended the call. He recited Quentin's email address while Nazz typed it into his phone. Nazz and Bunny were practically quivering with excitement. Only Lena seemed calm.

A black car pulled into a designated parking space. The driver, a clean-shaven, anxious man in his early thirties, got out. Carefully dressed in jeans and a well-cut jacket, he wore a shirt with no tie.

'Hi Victor. Sorry I'm late.'

Victor had no idea how to greet his son. 'Long time no see,' he ventured.

'Sure is. Last time we met, I was only two,' said Rourke. 'Sit in. I'll put your suitcase in the boot.'

As Victor ensconced himself in the passenger seat, he barely noticed the girl passing by, dragging a suitcase awkwardly behind her, her baby whinging now from the folds of its purple sling.

As Rourke drove out of the airport and onto a road that led to the city centre, Victor had a chance to study him. Rourke seemed utterly recognisable; something about his face; those hands on the steering wheel; like Victor's hands; a wedding band; he must be married.

'I've organised an apartment for you for the week,' said Rourke.

'I'm not staying with you?'

'It's easier this way,' Rourke paused. 'I think you'll like it,' he added. 'So long as you don't have a problem with heights. You don't, do you?'

'I don't think so.'

As Rourke drove, he bit the inside of his lip. Just like Siofra, who used to bite the skin inside her mouth whenever she was troubled or puzzled. Victor used to tell her that if she wasn't careful she'd end up with two big holes in her cheeks. He imagined Siofra lying in her coffin, eyelids fluttering open, her eyes staring out at him accusingly from her beautiful face. For she had been beautiful, though he had not fully realised that at the time.

Rourke drove skilfully, at an even pace. As they reached the city he spoke again.

'You'll see it in a couple of seconds.'

'What did you call it again?' said Victor.

'The Elysian. It's the highest building in Ireland now.'

A tall conglomeration of towers studded with glass squares loomed ahead. The Elysian would not look out of place in Milan or Lisbon, thought Victor. It was almost unimaginable that anyone would have conceived of such a building in Cork. Rourke turned right and then, carefully, right again. He used a card to raise a barrier and drove into an underground car park, where he eased the car into parking space 17.

'There's a communal garden in the centre,' Rourke said. 'Very nice. Very Zen. But first I'll show you where you're staying.'

In the elevator, Rourke pressed the top button. 'It's quiet here. Most of the apartments are empty—people can't afford them.'

The main living area of the penthouse suite was a double-height space. One wall, almost entirely made of glass, opened onto a balcony. It was full of light now, as the cold May sun had come from behind the clouds to shine over a panoramic view of Cork City to the east. The River Lee stretched out below, and a tall ship was moored by the quay. Everything seemed familiar but distant.

The vast sitting-room was furnished with a basket chair dangling from the ceiling like the one from a '70s advert for nylon tights, an L-shaped couch in tan leather, a metal and glass coffee table, a cut glass vase filled with artificial orchids on a large dining table, a Rothko print on the wall, a gigantic flat-screen TV.

'Amazing.' It was the kind of city pad Victor imagined a Russian oligarch might own.

'I figured you were used to staying in fancy places.'

'Yeah,' said Victor. It was nothing like his housing association flat in Holloway.

'So, it's okay?'

'Brilliant,' Victor managed. 'Is this your own place?'

'God no. A friend lent it to me.'

'Oh.'

'The place is empty, so he let me have it for the week.'

Rourke certainly knew the right people, thought Victor, jubilantly. He'd only have to pitch the thing properly and Rourke would immediately understand that to invest in his father's rock opera was a win-win situation.

'You're doing so well.'

'I'm doing okay.'

'I googled you, a while back. Amazing. My son, the youngest ever director of PharmaShaman Pharmaceuticals.'

'It's about the only thing that didn't go down the pan during the recession—so yeah, I've been fortunate.'

'Selling legal drugs, ha ha.' This was the wrong note, Victor realised. He tried again. 'Your company—does it take an interest in the Arts, at all?'

'We sponsor a few local things. Midsummer Festival, Christmas in Bishop Lucey Park, that kind of thing. The kitchen is through here.'

Rourke led Victor into the kitchen, where he patted the black marble counter.

'Designed by Porsche, would you believe.'

'Nice.'

'I got in some milk, butter, oranges—there's a juicer there—bread and cheese from the English Market. Would you like a drink? I mean tea or coffee or something? I didn't get wine or anything. I presumed…'

'Oh no, no, I never touch the stuff now. Clean as a whistle, I am. Clean as a new pin.' *Shut up*, he said in his head. 'Squeaky clean.'

'I was surprised when you contacted me. Not saying you're

not welcome, but when you didn't come for the funeral?'

'Ah no. Sorry. I just thought it wasn't…'

'Mam wouldn't have minded. She always gave everyone a second chance. I miss her terribly.'

Rourke's phone rang. He bit the inside of his mouth again as he pressed a button to accept the call. 'Yeah, I'm with him now. What is it?' He listened for a moment. His face changed from anxious to stricken. 'Shit. I'll be there in a few minutes.' He put the phone back in his pocket and picked up his car keys from the kitchen counter. 'I'm sorry. I've got to go. It's an emergency.' He headed for the door, then whirled round. 'I nearly forgot. The entrance code and the wifi password are on the notepad next to the sink. I wrote the mobile number of the building superintendent down too; any problems, he's on the ground floor and he knows you're here for the week. Sorry about this. I'll text you once I know what's happening.'

Alone in the Elysian penthouse, all Victor could hear was a low sinister hum; from the heating maybe, or from the super-sleek stainless steel fridge. It was too quiet. He contemplated turning on the TV but the remote controls unnerved him. He opened the balcony doors and stood outside. The wind had risen and the sun had retreated behind those biblical clouds. It was going to rain again. It was cold. Far too cold for May.

Siofra. She had been—yes—his first love. He couldn't remember any other woman with such clarity. Rourke called his manager about the funeral two years ago. Victor had been skint, and, anyway, he couldn't face it. Only now, he fully understood that she was dead and that he had failed her yet again. Why the hell did Rourke feck off and leave him stranded here? What the fuck was he going to do for the night?

He'd do some work. That's what he'd do. Then he'd go out, spend a few of those euros, get a bite to eat, have an early night. He settled in, opened his battered suitcase, drew out the score for the rock opera he'd almost completed—well, the first draft of it anyway.

This must work. It has to be a success. There's nothing else I know how to do. He tried to concentrate on the problem with the chorus at the end of Act One, but the musical notation began to blur and he

had absolutely no idea how to continue. The only rock opera he had ever gone to see had been a travesty; overblown, pretentious and *deeply* uncool. As he thought this way the notes he'd carefully written by hand began to crotchet and quaver all over the pages, and the lyrics underneath seemed ludicrously vague.

He closed his eyes for a moment, but all he could see was Siofra's shocked face. It was 1981. They were living in a flat in Kentish Town. Siofra's work had sent her to Paris, but she came home a day early and found him wrapped around a Polish groupie in the kingsize pine bed she'd bought three weeks before. Gog's Evil Design had been big in Poland. Siofra was two months pregnant. He hadn't known.

Siofra's beautiful face. Her tears. Her blue-grey eyes assessing him and finding him entirely wanting… He could do with a drink or something stronger. He remembered his own parents, long dead, and the cold house in Ballincollig he'd escaped from. His father P. J. Hussey, ex-army officer, staunch Charlie Haughey supporter, chairman of the Pigs and Bacon Commission, whose disapproval of Victor turned into violent dislike after he dropped out of college. His mother, unable to cope, weak and deluded on Valium, always called him 'her pet' but where was she when the strap lashed down on the buttocks? Smoking her Silk Cuts furtively in the straggled yard, that's where.

God he needed a drink. In a frenzy he opened and closed cupboard doors, the fridge, the freezer, even the built-in wardrobes in the bedrooms. No alcohol anywhere.

Fuck it, I may as well head out and get a drink. Least I deserve. Fresh t-shirt; quick check in the mirror; lift the chin; draw in the stomach; great bone structure, the military crewcut suited him; fine and dandy; out he went.

After a reasonable curry and several bottles of Singha in the Indian Palace, Victor felt more like himself. A short walk would do him the world of good, he reckoned, before he returned to the eery quiet of the Elysian. As he passed by a small side street, someone called his name.

'Wow, Victor Hussey you legend. You made it!'

There was Nazz, waving at him. Bunny was there too. So

was Lena of the blue-black hair, resplendent in a black leather minidress and high boots.

'We just finished the sound-check. Come in and have a drink.'

Pint short pint short pint short shynt port shynt port.

Yeah, lads, it's Victor from Gog's Evil Design. You're a fuckin' legend Victor. I'd never have got into music only for you. Got all your albums. On vinyl. The originals. Me older brother was well into the Gogs. The Blue Goldfish album. Fuckin amazeballs. That Late Late Show's on Youtube, you know, the one with you doing wreck to the holy statue; Gay Byrne's face! Sure of course you'll do a guest spot?

OF COURSE… It was show time on a small stage in a room above a pub in Cork and the Jupiter Scumbags belted unevenly into the first song and the second and then they got a bit tighter and the room was reeling a bit, the small crowd swaying—twenty, max—Victor drank a bit more, Nazz called his name AND OUR SPECIAL GUEST THE LEGENDARY VICTOR HUSSEY and everyone cheered and Victor jumped off his bar stool and raced onto the stage and he could barely hear himself above the sound of the drums and bass and guitar but was more or less in tune as he hollered out the mixed-up lyrics of his major hit 'The Screws Are Loose' and the machine *worked* and the Jupiter Scumbags were making a fair old hand of it and Lena was doing a bit of backing vocals and they were gunning it now and the barely-there crowd was up on the old hind legs dancing, one more verse, almost there, nearly the end, he waved his arm up and down and the band stopped playing as one, all tight, just right, one big full stop and the microphone stand fell to the floor… an explosion of applause… Victor, still grasping the microphone, roared into it, 'Thanks, you fucking lunatics!' and his voice boomed and the crowd called 'More, more,' but the Jupiter Scumbags didn't know how to play any other Gogs' numbers so Nazz said 'Same again' and this time they drove right into 'The Screws Are Loose' and it was even better—a song about frustration, about things that didn't work properly, including Victor's head, a line in it about nails falling out of a cross so even the Crucifixion was a balls-up—and, at the end of the song, Victor fell face forward flat on the stage, arms outstretched like a crucified

Christ who's fallen off his cross (just like he'd done when he played at Glastonbury, but never seriously thought he'd have the nerve to do again) and the place went apeshit crazy and Victor got up and bowed like a small child at the Feis and walked off the stage. He felt dirty, filthy, sweaty, hung-over, spent… and all he wanted was to do it all over again.

There was a kind of tidal wave to the events that followed, but somehow Victor was ferried in glory back to the Elysian by the Jupiter Scumbags and a handful of supporters, having munificently purchased drink from the Cypress Avenue bar with most of his dwindling supply of euros. A ferrety-faced dealer from Dublin came with them. There was a deal of excitement in the Penthouse that night; bottles and cans popped open, joints rolled, excited discovery of bread and cheese in the kitchen.

'I gotta bit a coke alright,' the ferret-face said, producing a wrap. 'And I got deese little lads.' He took two jam jars out of his jacket pocket. Each jar was full of magic mushrooms floating in a clear liquid. On each jar was a white handwritten label. One label read, '*2013 – bouncy*' in blue biro. The other, in the same handwriting, bore the mystifying words, '2014 – *quiet*.'

'Deese here are your introvairted kind a shrooms, and deese ones from tootowsananturteen, dey're a more lively, rockin' trip,' said the Dubliner.

A lively rockin' trip, decided Victor and slurped some down, parting with the last of his euros. For a short while, nothing much happened except the making of toast and disorganised slicing of cheese and investigation of Victor's ageing laptop because it was the only source of music they had and Victor began to dance and come up and it was a lively rockin' trip until he had to stop and cry and then be swarmed with pure love by the Jupiter Scumbags and dance again—umpteen times to *We Are Family*—while the walls of the Penthouse turned from smooth and pale, switching back and forth from bright yellow to the mottled texture of old banana skins, and the fridge jiggered along with the music.

In the master bedroom lay Lena of the blue-black hair. It was 5 a.m. Surely an invitation, Victor thought, as he lay down alongside her

and kissed the nape of her neck. As he began to lick her ear, she moaned sleepily and turned on her back to look at him.

'Jesus,' she said and sat up, blinking, one of her jet black eyelashes askew.

'Relax,' he said and patted the quilt.

'Fuck off, Grandad,' she said. She picked up her high boots and left.

When Rourke arrived at 2 pm the following afternoon, the last of Victor's new acquaintances had slunk out and slid away (apart from Bunny, still retching in the loo).

'Jesus Christ,' said Rourke. 'The place is wrecked.'

'It's not too bad. I'll have it sorted in no time.' Victor's hands had an old man's tremor as he made a pot of coffee and spilt some on the black marble counter.

'Now, I need to talk to you about this rock opera I'm putting on. See, I'm looking for a backer…'

He looked around for his musical score, for the rock opera that would change his fortune. It lay on the kitchen counter as if it had been tortured. There were splashes of beer on it, a scorch mark, probably from a fallen joint, even a footprint. He picked it up and waved it at Rourke.

'A backer?' Rourke stared at Victor. 'Is that… That's what you came to talk about?'

'Well, partly. What's the problem? You seem a bit upset.'

'Upset? Of course I'm upset.'

'Look, I came all this way to see you…'

'London isn't "all this way",' Rourke said, and the expression in his blue-grey eyes was exactly like Siofra's, the last time she'd looked upon Victor.

1984, it was. He'd come 'to sort things out.' Siofra was in her parents' sitting room, sitting on the couch with two-year old Rourke on her lap. She bit the inside of her lip, as she listened to him. *One-off payment. Confidentiality agreement. Harsh realities. The music business. My image. No hard feelings.* Really, the fault lay with Victor's manager Quentin and the lawyer. They hadn't told him how to explain it properly. Victor remembers Siofra's mother taking the crying child out of the room, Siofra's two brothers entering, like

bouncers, and that look on Siofra's beautiful face before she stood up and walked out.

'I'm sorry about the mess,' he said to Rourke now.

'Sorry isn't enough.'

Victor felt suddenly angry. 'Don't you know who I am? What did you expect when you just fucked off and left me to fend for myself?'

'Expect?' Rourke stood there, chewing frantically at the inside of his mouth. 'What did I expect? I thought you came to make amends.' He walked towards the door, as if to leave. Then he stopped and turned to stare at Victor.

'Victor, listen to me.' He spoke in a cold, clear voice. 'It was my wife on the phone yesterday. Our son had suspected meningitis. Myself and Martha had to take him to hospital.'

'Your son? You have a son?'

'Yes. Your grandson.'

'I have a grandson?'

'He's ten months old. He's beautiful.' Rourke brushed what might have been a tear from his eye. 'So there I was in the early hours of the morning, stuck in the hospital, waiting and hoping that my child would be all right. He *is*, not that you've bothered to ask. I had my laptop with me so I googled you—just for something to do. And what did I find, but a brand new Youtube clip. Some unbelievably efficient member of the Cork music scene put it up at 2 a.m. You better have a look.'

He turned to Victor's laptop and typed something in, then swivelled it so that Victor had a clear view of the screen.

There is the diminutive crowd in Cypress Avenue moshing in front of the tiny stage where now the camera zones in on Victor, his gut protruding between his too tight jeans and his t-shirt, his scalp shining baldly through his marine cut—oh the horror begins—he's leaping around like a lunatic, gesticulating as he roars 'The Screws Are Loose' completely out of tune while Lena, behind him, points her index finger to her temple and turns it round and round, then points at Victor and raises her eyebrows as she sings, mocking him to the audience. Nazz, oblivious, wreaks havoc on guitar, the drummer flakes and flails and Bunny frets intensively on bass while Lena rolls her eyes behind Victor and makes a wanking

motion with one hand… the camera zones in on the handful of people in the audience, and Victor had no idea until now that they are all laughing *at him*, not *with* him, that he is nothing but a joke, and when he throws himself upon the floor some of them are so creased with laughter they look as if they will throw up. From laughing. At him.

'You were all piss and vinegar last night, weren't you?' said Rourke, caustically. 'I gave you a second chance, Victor, like Mam did. But you know what? That's it. I'm too busy for this shit. I'm busy raising my kid and trying to make sure I don't end up being an arsehole like you. So please leave. You've one hour to get out of here.'

'Ah Rourke…'

'Give me the keys. I'll lock up.'

'What? But…'

'No more buts,' Rourke said. The door closed firmly behind him.

On the plane, Victor took the score for his rock opera from his jacket pocket. As he unfolded the party-scarred sheets of music, a toddler popped its head above the seat in front and stared. 'Day day,' the child said, as it waved a fat hand and tried to grab the score.

'No,' Victor said, and clutched the papers to his chest. He shook his head at the child, who looked perplexed and turned away. Victor forced his attention back to his work but the lyrics were indecipherable and the lopsided musical notes crocheted and quavered before his bloodshot eyes.

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Tommy Franklin

Conor J. McManus

Sometimes Tommy Franklin dreamt of briars. Of blackberries. Of blood red hawes. Of chestnuts. Of lichen mottled lime-stone walls. Of brown cut-stone walls. Of the green moss that grows in the grey mortar joints. Of rain-washed grey mortar joints that show tiny red flecks of sand. And sometimes he dreams of the mouse. The mouse that had the litter in the meal bin - with half a sheet of galvanised as a lid and a quarter block, black from the handling of cowdung hands, weighing it down.

These are waking dreams and sometimes they crop up at the oddest moments. Like now. He's tieing steel at the bottom of a hole. An almighty hole. A steel sheet sided hole. Pumps going. Pumping out the Lee. Pumps that are about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike. The biggest job in the city flooded with water and Poles and Portuguese and the money shite. O'Hara's going to be a millionaire before he even gets her out of the ground.

From up on the road, the mesh of rusty re-bar looks like the strings of a tennis racket. Standing on the heavy bars, with heavy boots, stooped, he loops the tie wire round two bars where they cross, one quick twist, snip, move on, next one. It's Thursday. The Sextant at five or maybe nip in for one at lunch. Darina comes on shift at four in The Idle Hour. He could go down and look at her. And there's a one in the English market. She works on the meat counter. Every Saturday he goes in and buys two pork chops and doesn't say much else. He puts the chops in the first bin he finds on Grand Parade.

Sometimes he watches his hands. Straining, twisting and snibbing the wire. Brown rust coated hands. He sees the inside of an apartment, Sunnyside, Queens. One of those apartments with heavy furniture, heavy carpets, and everything is brown. The carpet is brown. The curtains are brown. The upholstry's brown. Everything is brown, brown and heavy except the gun. The white bone handled gun. Its silver embossed filigree like the toy cap gun he had when he was a boy. And the brown plastic hat with the star on front. Peeling. He'd encouraged JJ to buy it in the Pocconos. The bone

handle, the silver embossing and Linda's hair. Black. Black as jet. That was in the early days before he lost everything before he came back for his father's funeral. The white van rotting under the crumbling 'L' in Woodside. West County Construction and a green shamrock, a moss green shamrock, on the side. Tickets flapping under the wipers and the tyres perishing and cracking and going green. Moss green. He ties and snips. The red plastic handle of the nips. The blood red hawes. The red flecks in the grey mortar joints. The mouse in the meal bin. He wishes Linda and him and JJ were all together. He wishes he was going home to them. He wishes he could holiday in Florida with Linda. Or head up the Catskills for the weekend and he'd put the car on cruise control and she'd reach over and place her hand on the nape of his neck on the long drive home. He just wishes he was away to fuck out of this wet kip. He wishes he was the boy in the brown plastic cowboy hat looking in at a litter of mice in a meal bin, a strong dung stained hand on his shoulder.

Elysian

Patrick Cotter

Conceived first in a glossy prospectus
but now for real the tall gleaming tower
surges up like some heraldic raptor

of concrete and glass, its legs still striding
the earth even as its wings swoop higher
than the clouds. It swells us with pride

for our engineers and our laborers
pride, for our speculators and our bankers
—we, who had no need of a tower

with a thousand rooms, a million reflecting
panes, illuminations visible from space.
It is the standing proof of a prowess

we always knew we had but never thought
to use, we with our snug low-lying houses
ordered in terraces which meander

mimicking in layout, the wandering rivers
and undulating hills; houses low-lying
and snug, deterring lightning and scythe

—like winds and the copious columns
of relentless rain. The tower gleams, surges
illuminates and stands empty, untouched

but for the automated window washers
we occasionally deploy; a monument
to our wealth and largesse, as our lives

carry on without it, around it, not caring
a damn what they think of us in Manhattan,
Shanghai or Dubai; as if to say:

'we'd live
in crannogs if we wanted to, or build
a thousand more just like this one.'

Tóg

Julie Field

Crann concréideach
ag stánadh anuas
ar mhioneitilt na cathrach

súile amhrasacha
ag díriú air

mionchaint na mílte
ar thóir na síolta
a shamhlaigh a shaol

ceisteanna ag fás uaidh
seachas fréamhacha faoi

stoite

ionannas in easnaimh
ionannas aineoil

seanchaí na Laoi
ag tochas a chinn

stoite

Folly

Mary Morrissy

Here she is, head literally in the clouds. Exactly what her mother warned her about, or against. Now she's living it. A glazed penthouse, sixteen floors up, with a balcony like a knife-edged prow jutting out perilously into thin air. This place is proof of something, though what it is she doesn't know. Success? Maybe, but she still can't call it home. *Carmond* it isn't. An Edwardian red-brick in St Luke's, the auctioneer's bumpf said, on an elegant terrace of officers' housing, lovingly restored by its present owner, with original features, blah blah, blah. *That* was home and Ray had done her out of it.

'It should have a name,' he'd said when they'd mortgaged their lives for it nearly 25 years ago when it was a wreck. Carmel thought he was joking. Where she came from houses didn't have names. But Ray said it would be like carving their love on a tree. (They had been childhood sweethearts.) Carmel loves Raymond; together they made *Carmond*. Ray was a bit of a fool sometimes. But in time, he was proved right. The wreck grew into its name, came to be the expression of all their homely ambitions. The kitchen extension with a range, the conservatory, the tended lawn, a rockery.

Sometimes as a young mother, she had stood at the old scullery window in *Carmond*, elbow-deep in suds and staring out at the windswept garden (this was the early days when it was littered with kiddy paraphernalia—an upturned slide, flung-down bicycles) and daydreamed about the kind of existence she has now. An apartment in the city, an entitled sense of leisure. She'd imagined coming home after a day at some ill-defined office job, a decorous career of some sort, and opening a bottle of wine before fixing dinner for one. There was never a lover in these scenarios. Even in her fantasies she couldn't supply a figure who wasn't Ray. A failure of imagination, she supposed. Just as now, she cannot imagine herself into her present situation, a woman in late middle age who has finally become cherished for all the wrong reasons.

Once she had been the linchpin of a busy household though she'd never been cherished for that. It was the natural

division of labour as far as Ray was concerned. He was the breadwinner; she did the rest. Her job was to keep the home fires burning, do the school runs, attend the parent-teacher meetings, manage the family budget, read the bedtime stories. Later it included nursing Amy through her breakdown, or propping Ray Junior up when his fiancée left him, or calming Louise when one of the twins was diagnosed with Asperger's. But it's not for any of those reasons that she's living in a top-end apartment with the floor dimensions of a hotel ballroom. This is not Ray's way of extravagantly saying thank you or even telling her she's worth it. She's hiding here. Hiding Ray's wealth in plain sight.

Meanwhile he's in a bed-sit in Reading sitting out his bankruptcy. Living like a building-site Paddy or a layabout student. Except Ray was never a student. He went straight from school into his father's betting shop and never looked back. Built a nationwide chain, he would say proudly. A household name. Now having divested himself, he's the poorest of them and, somehow, it shows. Last time he Skyped her, he was in his stockinged feet and there was a hole in the toe which he lifted up to the screen wiggling his foot at her as if she could virtually darn it. He raised his empty tumbler like an unasked question. He hasn't completely succumbed to austerity. Whisky of an evening for a bankrupt? She could, if she wanted to, shake her head at the screen and ask, can you afford it? As he used to once grumble about her buying clothes or getting a Botox treatment. Now, when she could be overdosing on the stuff and no one to question it, her brow is a riven minefield.

In their hey-day Ray was in charge of the finances. Carmel had no idea how rich they were. It was unlucky to ask; if a figure was mentioned, it might all go up in smoke. She only knew there was plenty. Don't you worry, Ray used to say, so she didn't. Wasn't that what people meant when they said they were comfortable? She'd put her hand out and Ray had provided. Under the new dispensation everyone's doing better than him. Amy got the apartment in Nice, Ray Junior got the boat and Louise's twins have an education trust and they're only five. Carmel has the penthouse and a lump sum. At 53, she's finally a dowried bride.

The trouble is she doesn't know how to live here, in a tower aiming for the sky. She hasn't the energy or the will to fill these vast

spaces that refuse to be domesticated. (Why, she wonders, are they called penthouses when you feel the opposite of pent-up in them?) Take the living room, for example, which is a long, lean cavernous space, glass-walled on two sides. On the balcony side, the huge windows are hinged and can be opened. Even so, fresh air seems at a premium up here. Sometimes she feels like a piece of wilted lettuce in a Tupperware box.

Ray had chosen the show-apartment.

'For yourselves, is it?' the garrulous estate agent asked. 'Or is it an investment?' He had a savage crew-cut like a prison inmate let loose in a suit.

Ray had brought her to view the place, though why he bothered she didn't know. He'd already decided to buy it; or rather decided that she would.

'The wife,' Ray said jerking his head towards Carmel. These small betrayals stung more than the dismantling of their life.

'Ah, I see,' the agent said. 'Wife wants, wife gets.'

Because it was the show flat, Carmel had inherited the fittings—heavy curtains which she often draws during the day turning the middle of the afternoon into night and shutting the views out. It's more restful that way. Ridiculous, but she has the feeling of being overlooked all the time, though she's in the tallest building in the city. *Top of the world, Ma.* (She can just about pick out The Buildings from here.) If she hasn't drawn the curtains during the day, she whips them closed with nightfall. Without them, she can see her own reflection and it troubles her—her double moving about out there unsupported in the dark air. Behind the heavy drapes are filmy full-length muslin nets in various hues from blaze to sickly mustard, depending on the light and the time of day. Sometimes, at sunset, it seems the place is aflame. The interior decorator was intent on injecting warmth into the glacial interior so the large shag rug in the sitting area, the squat, low-lying leather settee, even the one and only solid wall is orange. At the far end of the apartment the sleek cold kitchen retains its steely demeanour.

The open plan is merciless. Just last week Carmel chanced upon a documentary on TV—she watches the History Channel during the day behind the closed curtains—about lighthouse

keepers. They lived in threes to stop them turning on one another but still they went a bit mad, apparently, from living in the round. There were no corners, the voiceover said, so there was nowhere they could go where they weren't observable. She knows how the poor sods felt. The windowless bedroom is the only respite from the persistent transparency, built into the cement core of the construction. Like a burial vault for an ancient queen. She has dreams of being found in there surrounded by coral amulets and terracotta amphoras, her jewellery in rich piles around her. This from her night course—Adult Ed art history. Bits of it come back to her at odd times. The ruins of Pompeii, Tutankhamun. Ends of eras and empires. At the time, none of it seemed to apply. Now everything seems weighted with a message specifically aimed at her. Yesterday, for example, she heard a quiz on the radio, the kind where listeners ring in and are grilled while a clock loudly ticks down a minute. *Complete this well-known proverb; people in glasshouses shouldn't throw* … 'Parties?' was the hapless reply. She'd laughed out loud. Today she thinks, that's me. Except who would she invite here?

She could ask the neighbours, she supposes. Those few hardy souls with more money than sense rattling around in this glass menagerie. Except there aren't enough of them to make a party. There's a couple on Floor 8, in their thirties, with chocolate brown mock cane furniture out on the balcony. There's another man in his sixties on Five who parks his bike out there, so that it looks like an exhibit in a museum. Proof of life. Her balcony is bare. She doesn't go out there; every time she does it seems like a cry for help.

When she moved in, she ordered a fig tree to create the illusion of a garden. It was an enormous thing, the weeping variety. She'd never had room for such a specimen in *Carmond* (Oh, but she'd had rambling roses and fragrant bowers of lavender!) But when the man delivered the fig, she thought, no, much more space for it inside, where it could provide shelter from the design cruelty. It serves as a divider now on the marbled catwalk to the kitchen.

Anyway, why is she worried about parties? Nobody comes here. Anyone who managed to breach the plate-glass armoured exterior would have to face the coded lifts. They'd have to be buzzed up. The children come, but intermittently. Well, Amy's in

Nice and Louise is terrified on her children's behalf of the balcony and the hard surfaces. (Every sound is magnified here. When Carmel sets a mug on the glass coffee table it makes a ceramic thunk. Putting her keys down sounds like sniper fire.) Ray Junior barely darkens the door. Of all of them, he resents the loss of *Carmond* most and in some obscure way seems to blame Carmel for it, as if she'd done him out of his birth-right. You think I want to be here, she wanted to scream at him, you think this was my idea? Time was when she'd have the kids over for lunch every Sunday; it used to be a tradition at Carmond. But it rang hollow here.

The truth is almost everything about her old life has disappeared. The penthouse seems to have swallowed it up. Friends from her *Carmond* existence have fallen away. At first she thought it was the location; then she wondered if it wasn't something to do with the bankruptcy. The whiff of disgrace; a suggestion of moral weakness. Hers. As if she should be sitting on a piece of cardboard with a paper cup on the pavement. She supposes she should be grateful—if Ray were a banker, people might be spitting at her in the street. Dee, whom she's known since school, was full of plausible excuses. She'd had her own troubles—a round of chemo after breast cancer, but that was over now. She didn't come into town much, Dee said, did her shopping in Mahon. Jacinta, who used to be her next door neighbour in St Luke's, hovered in the lobby a few times but wouldn't come up.

'Feels like City Hall in here,' she joked, 'and I have to pay a parking fine.' The only person who's actually visited is Margaret. Margaret Bird. And she only came once. In another life, she was Carmel's cleaning lady. Margaret was her first luxury—get someone in to do, Ray had said after Louise was born, we can afford it. Margaret came recommended, a stout woman who dyed her hair a terrifying black and rouged her cheeks. Her uniform was a nylon navy housecoat which she wore over her street clothes; when she moved she made a sound like grating sand. Although she was only a decade older than Carmel, she'd always seemed as anchoring as a mother. Carmel's mother had died when she was 18 so she'd come to lean on Margaret for advice. Although she was hired as a cleaner, it wasn't long before Margaret became a child-minder, granny-

substitute, counsellor and strict nurse. With four of her own, she had firm ideas about bringing up kids. Ray Junior was her first cause.

'That child,' she'd intoned pointing to him, 'should be on a puffer.' All of Margaret's diktats began with those words—*that child.* When Carmel resisted—Ray Junior had always been wheezy—Margaret tried again.

'Take him to the specialist,' she'd said. 'There's a grand fella in the Bons who'd look after him.'

Still, Carmel took no notice. He was snuffly, that's all. A month went by. Then Margaret said quietly. 'That child is suffering.'

'He's fine, Margaret,' she'd said. 'Don't worry. He'll grow out of it.'

'I could report you for neglect, you know.'

'I beg your pardon,' Carmel said. The cheek of her!

'You heard me,' Margaret said with a belligerent jut of her lower lip.

Dee told her to fire Margaret. She has no right to speak to you like that, she said. But Carmel didn't sack Margaret. She took Ray Junior to the doctor and, as it turned out, Margaret was right. He was put on an inhaler.

The next battleground was Amy.

'That child should have braces on her teeth,' she told Carmel, 'or she'll have an overbite. It'll ruin her chances.'

This time Carmel ignored Margaret. Unlike Ray Junior's asthma, this was a cosmetic issue; the child wasn't going to keel over and die from prominent teeth. Anyway, Ray was still building the business at the time and they'd just extended the kitchen at *Carmond.* It troubled Carmel now to think that the only reason she didn't take Amy to the orthodontist—apart from the hideous expense—was the satisfaction of defying Margaret. Now she wonders if Amy's failure to thrive, as the psychiatrist put it, didn't stem from that decision. While she was seeing him, Amy told Carmel that the bullying at school had started with the kids calling her Bugs Bunny. But look it, Amy eventually did have her teeth straightened when she was 19. (They could afford it then and Ray had gladly paid.) She'd had to wear the dreaded braces for a year-and-a-half. Not that

it seemed to help Amy's self-esteem. Because it was too late, Margaret would have told her. If Carmel had asked.

That was the thing with Margaret. Whatever happened, she'd already had experience of it. Or of something worse. Her own family was a nest of social problems. She was a lone parent with a junkie son (Derek), an emigrant—Kev had gone to England—and Sandra who had Downs Syndrome. Sandra was a gloomy, wizened adult (although Carmel thought Downs kids were meant to be cheerful and sunny) who worked in a sheltered workshop making scented candles. Only Terence had fulfilled Margaret's ambitions. He had a trade—he was an electrician with a steady job, a purchased house, a wife and kids.

A year ago Carmel had let Margaret go. On Ray's urging—one of his ridiculous economies. Talk about shutting the stable door… It was when he'd told her *Carmond* would have to be sold.

'What's happened?'

'Bitten off more than I can chew.'

'But *Carmond*?'

'Need to liquidate my assets, love,' he said.

'But this is our home,' she'd wailed, 'you can't sell it out from under me.'

'It's part of the plan,' he said. 'I'll give you the proceeds and you'll buy somewhere else that'll be all yours. That way they can't touch it.'

'And what's happening to the shops?'

He didn't answer. He just shook his head.

'And get rid of Margaret,' he added.

Carmel felt she owed Margaret the truth.

'I don't want you to find out about this some other way,' she'd said. 'Or see the house for sale in the paper.' She explained their situation. She used Ray's word but it came out as liquidise, as if they were pulverising their lives into baby food.

'You're doing a flit?' Margaret said.

'Well, Ray is…' she began, hearing already that defensive tone that has crept into almost everything she says these days. The plan was for Ray to go to England, hole up for a year, and then the proceedings would be all over.

'What about all those people?' Carmel noticed Margaret didn't include herself in the ranks of those Ray was making unemployed. 'Leaving them in the lurch, are you?'

She found herself doing Ray's rueful head-shaking. Why should she feel guilty? *She* wasn't the one sacking 230 people. Am I my husband's keeper, she wanted to demand, but she didn't because she was, wasn't she? After 30 years of marriage, she was finally keeping Ray.

'It's not how we would have chosen to do it,' she said helplessly.

'You're ruining people's lives,' Margaret said. There was something infuriatingly implacable about her, standing there. When Carmel didn't answer, she'd picked up her coat and left the house without saying goodbye. Carmel had to post her the last of her wages—she remembered stuffing a wad of cash into the brown envelope without even counting it because she was so ashamed. Of Ray. Of herself.

It was a Thursday evening and Carmel had dashed down to the supermarket newly opened in the ground floor of the tower. One of the cheap German ones. It was handy for her, she had to admit, and now that she was shopping for one, she could do mercy dashes to the shop instead of having to make lists and push a huge trolley up and down the aisles piled to the gunwales with groceries. A basket did her now. She'd turned into the frozen foods aisle—dinner-for-one territory—when she'd ploughed into the back of a small woman in a bright red anorak.

'Oh sorry,' she said.

The woman turned and Carmel was confronted with a pair of dowdy breasts sheathed in a garish blouse. Blue and yellow zig-zags on a white background. It was like walking into a lightning storm. Distracted by the blouse it took Carmel a minute to register the face. It was Margaret in mufti.

'Margaret!' she said brightly. It sounded false, but it wasn't. She realised how pleased she was to see a familiar face.

Margaret eyed her, up and down, and nodded but she didn't smile. The cabinets exhaled ice.

'This is a great place for the bargains, isn't it?' Margaret went on as if they were taking up in the middle of an interrupted conversation. 'Not that you have to worry about that, I suppose.'

Carmel let the jibe go.

'How are you keeping, Margaret?' She didn't want to ask had she got other work; that would seem insensitive.

'I come here late on Thursdays for the sell-by date offers.'

Carmel felt a stab of remorse. At least Sandra wasn't with her; that would have been too much. 'Where are you these days?' Margaret asked.

'Here,' Carmel said. 'I live upstairs. Would you like to see?'

When Carmel showed her in, Margaret immediately made herself at home. She threw off her anorak and slung it on the burnt orange leather sofa. She padded about in her neon-striped runners and a pair of track pants. Carmel avoided looking at the blouse, though the apartment seemed to have neutered its effect. Margaret stared out at the view. She rubbed her hand along the furnishings. She twirled the shade on the standard lamp, the only item Carmel had brought from *Carmond*. She felt the stuff of the curtains.

'Fancy!' Margaret said and Carmel wasn't sure if it was approving.

'Would you like some tea?' Carmel asked.

It was the first time she'd ever played host to Margaret. In *Carmond*, it was Margaret who dictated tea breaks, calling to Carmel over the shouts of the children or the purr of the dust-buster. She made a strong and tarry brew and brought her own Mikado biscuits.

'Do you have one of those George Clooney machines?' Margaret asked casting her eye around the kitchen. It sounded challenging.

' 'Fraid not,' Carmel said. She foostered in the kitchen with the plunger pot. She scoured around in the cavernous kitchen presses for something to serve with the coffee. In the far reaches of one she found a packet of shortbread biscuits well past their prime. She emptied them on to a plate. She was unaccountably nervous.

'Is this where the swimming baths were?' Margaret shouted from the living area. Carmel had learned to swim there, a municipal haven for verrucas, a hot-bed of life in the raw. Toughies from the

Buildings, cadets from the barracks with tattoos, regal old biddies (like Rubens models) with sweaty rolls of flesh.

'No,' Carmel said, 'they were on Eglington Street. The postal sorting office used to be here.'

'The one they moved out to Churchfield, that one?' Margaret asked. Injun territory, Carmel was about to answer. 'My Terence has a lovely house up there.'

Margaret always asserted her claim to her children. Carmel would never say 'my Amy' or 'my Ray.' They were on loan to you, your children, she used to say to Dee, trying to sound philosophical. The words came back to haunt her when Ray had announced they were selling *Carmond.* When she'd baulked, they had ganged up on her. *You've got to for Dad's sake. Poor Dad,* they said as if Carmel had driven him off. She realised then how partisan their affection was. Poor Dad, indeed. Since moving to the tower Carmel finds she has less and less fellow-feeling for Ray. She could, she thinks, quite easily, leave him. He's given her the ammunition, hasn't he? She could walk away, rich. The thought of it made her feel giddy. It was the same sensation as when she stepped out on the balcony and looked down at the city. Giddy and slightly lethal. Was it something to do with being so high up? So removed?

When people gave out about the tower being an eyesore, a folly they said, she wondered why they were so worked up; it was so high you couldn't see the top of it from the street. So it was only people who already had the luxury of a view who had anything to complain about. All the same, it was funny how obliterating it was. Not to the view, but to the memory. This big bruising building had wiped out all that came before it. It was the same when the big road was driven through Douglas. Afterwards Carmel couldn't visualise the little village high street though she'd been there hundreds of times.

'Has he left you, is that it?' Margaret asked as Carmel took the plunger and pushed it down.

'No, no,' she said, 'it's not like that.'

She felt shy in Margaret's presence. In all their years together they'd never had a personal conversation. At least, not personal like this.

'No, Ray will be back,' she said.

Up to this, she hadn't thought about Ray coming back. It would have to be to here, wouldn't it? Where else would he go? The thought of the two of them in this apartment together seemed more outlandish than the present arrangement. Ray had always been a home bird; but that was when *Carmond* was home. You run off with the girls to Florence, he'd said happily when the Adult Ed tutor arranged a trip to the Uffizi, I'll mind the shop. Ray had never been to a museum as far as Carmel knew. He didn't get what art was all about; if she'd tried to interest him in Uccello he'd think she was for the birds.

'Are you sure?' Margaret said. 'My Kev got divorced once he got to England. He's living with a new one now.'

Carmel thought of her Skype sessions. Could there be another woman in Ray's bed-sit, out of frame? A woman who couldn't darn, obviously. No, she shook herself, this was Ray.

'No,' Carmel said firmly, 'this is just for the money.'

Margaret said nothing. Carmel pushed the plate of shortbread at her, but she didn't take one. Dusk was gathering and over Margaret's shoulder Carmel could see the sky was putting on a show—a darting sun struggling with long fillets of lilac cloud. But there was no distraction inside. When she and Margaret used to have tea in *Carmond*, there'd never been a quiet moment. Now there was just awkwardness. Maybe it was the wretched penthouse—maybe that was what spoilt everything. It had got in the way with her children; now it was stymying Margaret.

'That fig,' Margaret said pointing to the tree which was shedding its leaves. 'Looks like you've been overwatering it.'

Carmel smiled. For the first time in months she felt anchored. The one constant in her life had been Margaret's chastisements. If it wasn't her child-rearing, it was her plant care. She doubted that Margaret knew much about houseplants, but she couldn't be sure. Outside the enclosure of *Carmond* she didn't know much about Margaret, except what Margaret chose to tell her. After all, even her off-duty wardrobe had been a surprise to Carmel.

'So,' Margaret said finally when the silence had stretched into unease. 'When would you like me to start?'

'What?'

'Two days a week like before?' Margaret continued.

'Um… no…' Carmel began.

'You want me back, don't you?'

'But this place practically cleans itself,' Carmel said. She didn't want to say that cleaning the place kept her sane; it was her only occupation these days. But she wished she hadn't answered so quickly because Margaret looked crestfallen.

'I just thought when you asked me up…' she said plaintively. This was like a date gone bad, Carmel thought. She wanted to protest, to say, no I *do* want you back, just not to clean. (She used to have to go around *Carmond* after Margaret was finished her chores, redoing streaked mirrors and soap-limed windows.) What she wanted was Margaret's companionship. Perhaps that's what she'd been paying her for all along. To be her mother; to be her conscience.

'I'd best be off so…' Margaret said rising.

'No, no, please,' Carmel said, 'you don't understand.'

Margaret was shrugging on her anorak and zipping it up, eclipsing the lightning blouse.

'It's alright, Ma'm, I do understand.'

Did she just call me Ma'm, Carmel thought. Margaret had never called her that before; she'd never called Carmel anything. Margaret made for the balcony.

'No,' Carmel said, 'this way' and steered Margaret towards the lift which opened directly into the apartment. She pressed the button and the doors opened immediately.

'Now you know where I am,' Carmel said as Margaret stepped inside. Even to her own ears, she sounded desperate. 'Do call in—any Thursday evening.'

'Mind yourself now,' Margaret said as the doors shut on her. 'And don't forget, let the fig dry out.'

Carmel went out on to the balcony and waited for Margaret to emerge. Looking down she felt the magnetic pull of solid ground and a pressing desire to let go, to fall. Just as well the balcony was glassed-in. When Margaret appeared at street level she looked like one of those tiny striving figures in an architect's drawing, put in to

show scale. She didn't look up. Even if she had, she wouldn't be able to see Carmel. But Carmel waved just the same, half-heartedly, in case it might be mistaken for something else.

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The Chicago Syndrome

Frank McDonald

My first encounter with the Elysian tower occurred on the very day that votes were being counted after the May 2007 general election when I spotted the latest erection on Cork's skyline under construction after arriving at Kent Station. Coincidentally, I was to participate in a National Sculpture Factory symposium called *des/IRE*, which was all about designing good places to live in contemporary Ireland.

What the Elysian seemed to show was that the Celtic Tiger boom was becoming 'boomier', as Bertie Ahern had famously declared even as everything was about to fall apart. It was also clear from the lunchtime tallies that Fianna Fáil and their junior coalition partners, the PDs, had been returned to power—almost certainly because the plain people of Ireland feared that the boom would fizzle out if they weren't. But the hugely inflated property bubble was bound to burst, sooner rather than later. And it duly did the following year.

I detected a Chicago syndrome in the Elysian. Rising to 17 storeys, with an overall height of 81 metres, it was obviously intended to trump Dublin's tallest building (Monte Vetro, Google's European headquarters at the Grand Canal Dock) to claim the title of Tallest Building in the State. It happened before, of course, when Cork County Hall was deliberately designed to be a few metres taller than Dublin's Liberty Hall. In the same way, Chicago—birthplace of the 'skyscraper'—built the Sears Tower to beat New York's ill-fated Twin Towers, not long after they were completed in the early 1970s.

The Elysian is not the tallest building in Ireland, however. That title belongs to the 28-storey Obel Tower, in Belfast's Docklands, which stands 85 metres tall. Like the Elysian, it was conceived during the boom, but construction started later (in 2006) with the result that it wasn't finished until 2011—long after the property market had taken a plunge—at a cost of £60 million to the Karl Group. Financed by Bank of Scotland Ireland, which was owed more than £50 million on the project, the Obel Tower's 233

apartments remained stubbornly vacant for the simple reason that there's no economic market for them.

Cork's tallest building was also driven by hubris – the notion that, if you built something truly monumental, the punters would be queuing up to buy a piece of the action. 'The brief was simple,' according to the Elysian's website. It was to 'create a landmark building for Cork which shows the positive energy of its inhabitants, make it a showpiece for the way city centre development should go and, most importantly, create spectacular homes where all manner of buyers would be proud to live.' It was a case of 'build it, and they will come.' The big problem for O'Flynn Construction was that they didn't come.

The concept was much too metropolitan for the relatively small scale of Cork City. Indeed, it seems to have been influenced by the type of high-rise developments that characterise London's Docklands, rather than anything else. Certainly, the estate agents' hyperbole on the Elysian website (www.theelysian.ie) reflects the vaulting ambition of O'Flynn Construction to make a big statement 'reflecting the aspiration of Cork City to compete with other world cities, its scale giving it a landmark character implying an in-built public significance as a building and location.' I had never before seen Cork described as a 'world city.'

As well as 211 apartments, it was to have six retail units at ground level, landscaped garden at podium level and no less than 553 parking spaces in a double-basement beneath the buildings. Completed in September 2008, just before the collapse of Lehman Brothers precipitated the property crash, it proved impossible to sell the apartments at an economic price. By April 2009, more than three-quarters of the apartments remained unsold and half the retail space was still vacant, leading the *Irish Times* to describe the Elysian as a 'Mary Celeste adrift in the recession.' At one stage, apparently, it had only one actual resident, which must have been very eerie indeed.

The Elysian looks best from the south, where it is aligned on the axis of the South Link Road leading in from Kinsale, giving it a real gateway role. Designed by Cork-based Wilson Architecture, one of the key objectives was to 'achieve a development of sufficient density and mix of uses to create a sustainable, vibrant

district that integrates living, working and leisure, connects to a wider area and promotes the presence of people outside of working hours in this area of the city.' Thus, the tower is the tallest element of an overall scheme that also includes a number of six- to eight-storey buildings.

It was always swaggering for Michael O'Flynn to suggest that his bold scheme would provide a template 'for the way city centre development should go' in Cork, given that the city's population has been falling for three decades and was recorded as less than 120,000 in the 2011 Census. Thus, any notion that Cork is in some sense a 'chosen land' is preposterous. The unvarnished truth is that it lacks the critical mass to be a successful European city; it would need to have twice the population it currently has in order to compete successfully with Dublin for inward investment—and even to fill the Elysian.

Growth has been happening on its fringes, boosting the population of 'metropolitan Cork' to a grand total of 289,740, which is still quite small by European standards—although not as pathetically low as its current ranking in 584th place among cities in Europe. What Cork needs is more people, with good jobs and money to spend. Otherwise, there is little or no chance of developing the city's redundant docklands or brownfield sites such as Horgan's Quay, with a blank stone wall that runs for nearly a kilometre right in the heart of the city; that long block should long since have been broken up by new streets and squares.

As for Cork's docklands, it's very dubious that the ambitious masterplan for redeveloping this vast area will be realised (with the notable exception of Pairc Uí Chaoimh). Where are the people going to come from, to populate it? Even among planners, there are strong doubts about whether a doubling of Cork's population would be feasible without a command-style economy in which development could be directed under a coherent national spatial strategy. 'How would people react to being told go forth and multiply—but only if you are prepared to be a Cork hurling fan?,' as one of them said.

There was a time when this might have been possible. Way back in 1968, the Buchanan report on regional development—

commissioned by the Government—proposed designating both Cork and Limerick/ Shannon as 'national growth centres,' to counterbalance the development of Dublin. But although Athlone, Drogheda, Dundalk, Sligo and Waterford would have formed a 'second tier' of growth centres—to spread the benefits more widely—there was such a ferocious backlash from rural Ireland that the politicians in power gave up and opted for a *laissez faire* approach to the development of Dublin.

In its gutless decision on Buchanan, made in 1972, the Government allowed that the capital would continue on growing with no limits. The taoiseach at the time was Jack Lynch, who grew up on the north side of Cork city and played hurling for the county. Other notable Cork politicians over the years include Peter Barry, one-time deputy leader of Fine Gael, and Micheál Martin, the present leader of Fianna Fáil. What did any of them actually do to secure Cork's future? Not much, it would appear; the development of pharmaceutical plants around Cork Harbour was the only indication of preference for the 'real capital.'

The National Spatial Strategy, promulgated in 2002, didn't do any favours for Cork by designating nine growth 'gateways' (including Dublin) as well as nine 'hubs'—and even this classically Irish clientelist compromise was largely undone by the daft 'decentralisation programme' and the property crash. Although the N.S.S. has now been reviewed, there are fears that any serious effort to give Cork critical mass could damage Dublin, which is undoubtedly Ireland's strongest player internationally; having allowed the capital to grow like Topsy, its pre-eminence must now be protected at all costs.

Putting nearly all of the eggs for growth in Cork's basket would be a real challenge to our decrepit, dysfunctional political system as it would rub up against one of its central urges to please everybody everywhere—'something for everyone in the audience,' as Gay Byrne used to say. Quite apart from being good for Cork, setting a goal of doubling its population—backed up by tax incentives and other inducements to encourage investment—would also help to relieve the overwhelming pressure on Dublin and the appalling levels of congestion this creates in and around the capital.

But Cork was even at risk of losing its independent municipal government, just as Limerick and Waterford have already lost theirs. In January 2015, Minister for the Environment Alan Kelly—a political fixer of some renown—appointed an independent committee to make recommendations on whether the Cork City boundary should be extended to incorporate outlying towns such as Ballincollig, Blarney, Carrigaline, Glanmire and Glounthane. This should have been done years ago to recognise the reality of the metropolitan area, but it was consistently opposed by Cork County Council, for its own reasons.

The statutory committee, under the chairmanship of former Beamish and Crawford boss Alf Smiddy, was also asked to examine whether Cork City and County Councils should be merged to form a unified authority, on Limerick and Waterford lines. This would be a disaster for Cork, robbing the city of governance arrangements that date back to the 12th century. That's why eighteen former Cork mayors, from across the political spectrum, issued a joint statement condemning the 'super council' idea, saying it would divest the city of its 'essential powers to self-govern, to run its own affairs, to set its own budgets', etc.

What's at stake, as they know very well, is the future of Cork and whether the city was to be absorbed by its rural hinterland. Warning that 'a city without power is not a city,' the former mayors—including Micheál Martin—said: 'Cork City, with its rich social and economic history, would be relegated to "divisional status" within a single county authority, a type of municipal district with the same standing as country town… This is beyond belief.' Only an enlarged Cork City, with a full range of powers, had the potential to be a 'counter-magnet to the ever-increasing pull of Dublin,' their passionate plea declared.

All cities are engines of economic development for their regions (NOT the other way around), as Cork Business Association president Claire Nash pointed out. 'We are now sleepwalking into radical new governance arrangements that will emasculate the city, dilute its status, and grievously affect the dynamic that drives economic development,' she wrote in the *Irish Examiner*. Branding the notion of a merger as 'offensive,' Nash said: 'I've had my

moments with the elected members of Cork City Council but at least I know who they are, what they stand for and where to find them.'

The Smiddy committee's report, which predictably recommended a merger, as the Department of the Environment wanted it to do. But it was later set aside and a significant boundary extension for the city is now in prospect. What's really needed, however, is a decision on Cork City's role in this State and how it can be reinforced over time. Setting a goal under the latest National Planning Framework of doubling its population would be good for Cork, good for Ireland and good for the Elysian tower. It might then become the symbol of a re-energised Cork City, rather than a monument to the folly of a construction-driven property boom that left us all to pick up the bits and pieces.

The Elysian, An Aggregate

Paul Hegarty

I. The Origin of All Things

Where and when does a tower begin? Where is its end, and when does it reach it? Can we talk of one beginning, one end, or should we instead think of the multiple projections, aspects, tentacles, supports, meanings, plans, purposes, as so many ways into the question of beginning and end. For we might think that even if the question is complicated, that we just need to measure and an answer will arise. Even in that case, the tower's tendrils reach into property law (how wide, how deep, how high is the owned space? At what point is that amount of space defined as property?), politics, finance, the social, the cultural, even the psychological. The tower reaches, has its being in extension, beyond its solid form. In short, it is much less definable as volume than we might think; or, in fact, it is the opposite, its definitions overflow, trying to rise ever higher, but instead entangling. The beginning and end of the tower are not even encompassed by those dimensions, as the question of beginning and end takes place in a stranger relation, because the beginning is the end is the beginning. Or:

(the beginning is the end) = the beginning.

Is the beginning of the tower in its concept, its planning, or the laying of its first slab? Is the beginning in the hole it will build into and above? At what point can it begin, without its ending in mind, in place, if not yet in concrete form? The beginning, whenever that is, must contain the end. This is the logic not just of the built environment, but of all beginnings that begin some *thing*. So once the beginning is the end, then we have a beginning, or a way of identifying it, or, at least (most), a way of thinking about how we would identify it, if we thought that we could. Why complicate the beginning, though? Beginnings are not simple, they are not neutral, and reveal much of a present state, even if we look retrospectively back. Even isolating a beginning might be a thankless task, liable to

reveal more about the 'discoverer' than the origin itself. This is why we must archeologize, and why the question of a foundation, of a *ground*, is properly essential, precisely where such a thing might remain elusive, paradoxical or empty of anything useful.

The origin of a building is not just any origin, neither is it just any relation between beginning and end. To construct is to be in architecture, summoning the notion of origin as foundation. This is what lies at the heart of the *archē*, the thought on which all is built. The tower, as figure but also as material object, embodies the passage of the *archē* into being, and existing toward an end (*telos*). This mode of building, like any other, is haunted by the prospect of not being built, of the almost infinite time before it exists and the endless time after, of its not having a being. But the tower aspires to the embodiment of the upward surge to truth, heaven, knowledge, the good, to death, to life, to a reaching beyond mere living and into dwelling. It would be nice to imagine the designers of the posters that advertised the nascent Elysian building (enraptured faces looking up to where the building would one day end) having that thought. It would be nice to imagine this idol knowing itself to be just that, a perceptible presentation of something higher as well as something more mixed, and potentially parodic.

Heretical philosopher Georges Bataille thought of architecture as expressing the human soul. In that thought, he echoed Georg Hegel, and paralleled Martin Heidegger, both of whom saw building as an essential achievement, comprising the foundation of both aesthetics and culture, and so providing shelter for the human to not just literally live but also grow, philosophically speaking. Bataille, though, saw this gain as much more mixed, and argued that architecture was the prison humanity had built for itself, the primordial form of our will to be repressed, suppressed, rule- and house-bound. The tower, or skyscraper, stretches the desire for order into the sky. What was open expanse will make way for accommodation, offices, sales outlets and a solidification of the social and economic hierarchy of capitalism. The beginning of the tower is the aim to discipline space, the end is the realization of that discipline. So what happens when the tower does not so much collapse as remain standing when all else, or all that can be defined through the economy, collapses? That is what the Elysian tower

lived through, almost in defiance of the standard trajectory of the tower as form and figure. Like all towers, like all high rise construction, excess and failure cannot be entirely regulated. The tower might represent an over-literal pinnacle of regulatory codes and regimes, but it lives in a universe whose chaotic aspect can break through, despite being shunned, locked away or made to conform, in the normal, control economy that is late capitalism. The chaos will soon be whipped into shape, and in the case of the economy, the Irish population performed their heroic multi-annual sacrifice to provide welfare for the ailing rich, whether in this State or beyond, so the disaster was tamed. The Elysian, though, could not find sacrificial tenants, and even as the surrounding world returns to its proper functioning, and the development itself spreads around the tower's base, it still functions as an emptying device, a sparse upwardly-sprouting wilderness, in strange sympathy with New York's High Line park, where a disused elevated subway line has been turned into a horizontal or linear park.

II. Airlane

There have always been tall buildings, at least since the time of the Roman empire. There have always been monuments. But the monumental building that nonetheless has a function is something modern, only truly feasible as an aspiration after Elisha Otis' patented updating of the elevator device. The first such was installed at 488 Broadway, in 1857. Since that installation, Manhattan reached further, occasionally punctuated in its zenith quest, as with the erection of the Eiffel Tower in 1889. This tower extends its metal grids into the folds of the sky in mockery of Manhattan's sole and earthbound grid, but this grid would strike back with its own excesses. Against Roland Barthes's empty tower, Rem Koolhaas's overflowing grid (in *Delirious New York*) reaches upward, slicing the basic grid even as it adds on layers.

Eiffel's retooled bridge changes the parameters for what it is to be a tall building—where the elevator allowed people to rise within buildings, Eiffel's tower was all about the tower itself rising, and with it came the drive to be the world's tallest. That tower became the sign not only of itself, or of nothing very much (as

Barthes said), but also a portent of escalation. From the raising of the empty building (or non-building) of the Eiffel tower to its current solidification, its taking on body mass as city symbol, it took various functions. Firstly, it worked as an illustration of engineering prowess, and so was to be an end in itself, a self-reflexive building; next, it was to be knocked down, almost in recognition of its trailblazing role, pioneering on behalf of future towering construction; then, it was used as a radio mast, this simulated functionality assuring it survived long enough to take on value, and spawn over a billion spore trophies.

Vladimir Tatlin conceived of a monument to the Third International (1919-20) that would stretch to a height of 400 metres, a double helix of materials defining and using space rather than being a building based on enclosure. Where Eiffel glorified himself and the prowess of French engineering and industry, Tatlin looked to commemorate the Soviet Revolution of 1917, and to emphasize not just its modernity but its upward and forward momentum. The dynamism of these forms was a reflection of the material gains to be achieved in the striving for technological utopia. Tatlin's monument was never built, its fate to be remembered via a plan and model, a materialist conceptualization of the material that would never attain material existence in a way that could then be reconceptualized.

The tower as form was to take a different turn in the 1930s, with New York's Empire State building completed in 1931, and although it would remain the world's tallest building until the arrival of the twin towers of the World Trade Center (1973-2001), it was only part of a massive surge in extreme tall building in New York.

As Meaghan Morris notes, in 'Metamorphoses at Sydney Tower' we should not reduce/elevate all towers to being versions of an Ideal tower form ('Metamorphoses,' 16), instead each tower reaches out from specific circumstances, and changes meaning over time. The Empire State arose during a time of extreme financial turmoil, a skygrab of epic proportions, worthy of attack by King Kong and also a game changer in real estate development in the city, which could now expand its confines without losing its parallelist rigour. The Empire State stood as testament to investment, to speculating out of a crash. We still await the capitalists sadly giving over their homes and incomes in recognition of their neo-liberal

values. Only legal ties can be holding this up.

The Empire State did more than illustrate that wishing for growth could make it real, it also acted to solidify New York's centrality in whatever would follow the 1929 Crash. Likewise, the World Trade Center would come to embody the pivotal U.S. role in the global economy. As early as 1976 Jean Baudrillard categorized this building as the ultimate expression of monopoly, in that it displayed a pretence of competition in its twin tower aspect, while wiping out all other competitors on the skyline. Still, the Empire State, the Eiffel tower and Tatlin's projects may all diverge in their inspiration and what they illustrate beyond their simple presence, but they do all portend, they are all messianic expressions of building as something that rises the human out of the mire of our origins on four legs, and before that in the mud, or in the sea. By the time the World Trade Center arrives on the tall building scene, the International Style of Mies van der Rohe had carried the message of a soft internationalism that made the most of a hint of cosmopolitanism in order to achieve a blanket smoothing simplicity. Even the International Style, all glass and minimal structure in concrete and/or metal frame, has been whited out in today's soft modernism, and this, of course, is where the Elysian slots in, off the peg, a less than decadent restatement of the emptying of style or mission of the modernist tower.

The Eiffel tower and Empire State building are both players in the modern game of Tallest Building in the World. They became locations for the expression of human striving, a hand grasping into thin air forever. What though is the status of a nation's tallest building? What is going on when a 'developer' seeks to reach beyond the existing tallest (accommodation, office or commercial) structure, and this by a tiny amount? Not much, it would transpire. But the attempt tells us something about the leaving beyond of modernity, no neutral thing in Ireland. The previous highest building in the Republic is also in Cork, the Cork County Hall, opened in 1968. This fine example of concrete State architecture had its exterior remodeled between 2002-2006, a process common to many modernist buildings in Ireland, and highly visible in Cork, where the Opera House hides its modernist inheritance under a supplementary glass front and highly coloured posters, and where

the bus station (busáras) labours under some sort of pagoda extension. Dublin's landmark Busáras (completed 1953) has avoided such drastic remodeling, but where the Republic now honours previously shunned literary modernists, it still wages war on the possibility that the modern happened here.

Ireland is not alone in this, we need only look to the brutalist masterpieces of London's South Bank (built in the course of the 1950s and 1960s) that stood as markers of a new approach to culture and urban regeneration, now festooned in bullshit to cover up the concrete, or the closing of the actually iconic BBC centre (1960-2013) in White City, West London, and the pensioning off of the Post Office tower (1965) to see that meaningful, utopian building is being wiped off the visual or cultural map, left as empty monuments. An empty modernist monument, as Tatlin shows us, is more than nothing, it acts as requiem to utopian cultures, and in the case of Ireland or Britain, these buildings are witnesses to a time where the State did more than manage money or its absence. Maybe this is what today's politicians and businessmen find so troubling, the physical presence of a period that sought equality, open access to culture and the urban environment, to modern facilities. In any case, we 'chose' something else, and we got the Elysian.

The Elysian is upward mobility, part of a surge in high buildings that have no mission other than their function. Where modernism sought to combine form and function, today's soft modernism is an emptying of both. The tallest buildings in the world now offer 'lifestyle' to the existing rich, and so in a weird way, have no aspirational quality. Maybe this is what prospective clients thought of the billboards around the burgeoning Elysian—and with the thwarting of this assumed upward mobility of those who are already upward-facing, the building stayed empty. Still, that is nothing new, it seems the Empire State could not fill its spaces in an economically viable way for two decades.

The upward mobility in question is a global one, and global capitalism could see through Bertie Ahern's election-winning statement in 2007 that those who said the economy would crash should go and commit suicide, and did not buy into the Elysian project. No doubt 'global capitalism' has put some interns on the case to monitor the progress of apartment sales and jump in with a

'buy buy buy' when the time is right.

The tallest building in Ireland, with 3 metres to spare, for a total of 68.28 metres, is somewhat shy of the Burj Khalifa's height (828.9m), but that would neglect the upward thrust of the Elysian, its aspiration to be the place where dead warriors go… It would also neglect the fact that it was never supposed to be Ireland's highest building (it is fourth of the 'storeyed buildings' on the 'island of Ireland'), as there was a queue for many other tall buildings to join it in its cloud piercing, including the 'U2 tower.' The Elysian was to have modesty thrust upon it, but instead it sits slightly sadly as the highest (storeyed) structure in the Republic. The first and last of the boom towers, it had the misfortune to be built in time, out of time, behind time, in a time where its absurdity would become almost radical.

III. Swipe

Not for the Elysian the tragic fate of the tower of Babel. Where that tower aimed for heaven, for utopia, for a unified humanity reaching upward, only to be thwarted by YHWH, the Elysian just got built, and framed a space with nobody in. The tower of Babel is not just any tower, but should be seen as the Tower of Towers—the folly of ambition, the dream of ascension, the dream of engineering, the correction by a benevolent God, the lesson of a destructive God that can brook no competition, the strangeness of human desire in its wish to look beyond utility, the dawn of linguistic and cultural diversity as both loss and gain—so many turns for one edifice, encapsulated by Jacques Derrida as 'the myth of the origin of myth, the metaphor of metaphor, that narrative of narrative, the translation of translation' ('Des tours de Babel,' 191). The incompletion of the tower is what allows stories to take place. The Elysian's completeness hollows the capacity of a story to grow, and yet this hollow too mimics the non-whole of Babel. In both, 'translation then becomes necessary and impossible' ('Des tours de Babel,' 196).

Stranger still, the two buildings share a failure in their mutual drive to Reason. In both cases, instrumental, end-based achievement is thwarted, in Babel, it is the hand of a punishing God

that prevents the rational and co-operative enterprise; in the Elysian, it is the invisible hand of the capitalist economy that struck. Where God 'imposes and opposes his name, he ruptures the rational transparency but also interrupts the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism' of the reason that conceives the tower ('Des tours de Babel,' 199). The dead hand of a tumbling invisible and commodified culture reached in and stilled the calculating heart of the Elysian, taking it out of the financial economy and into some sort of aesthetic realm where it flickered between realities, entangled in two sets of dimensions and present in neither.

But of course the Elysian never aspired to bring all society together in its hubristic mission. Instead it sought to ignore the already existing diversity of the people below who would feed it whether they wished to or not. As it crept to the antechamber of the sky, awaiting the order to cease climbing, it just stopped, majestically devoiding its own spaces, a virtual replica of a toy Eiffel tower, all structure and no content. Dwelling is something that happens around and against this structure. Of course, one day, even these marks of distinction will desert the Elysian, and it will just be part of the apartmentalization of its city, weirdly unnoticed, its 68 metres a tragic monument to its heroic future that became a stultifying present of mediocrity. This then is the very contemporary achievement of the Elysian: first its emptiness takes away its celebratory zeal for consumerist display, and second, even this emptiness dissipates into being the most median, the most middling, of all structures in the city.

IV. Underpass

When buildings look up, and when they reach high rise or low rise form, we think of modernism, and primarily of its failure and subsequent demolition, as the concrete estates that fed social decay are removed from the landscape. But we are too hasty to remove modernism in all its manifestations, hopes and structures. Cork city is engaged in a war against modernism rivaled only by the hatred of modernism that happened in the time of its international success. The previously tallest building in the State has been clad in a new shell to hide its concrete, the bus station languishes under a sort of

pagoda, the concrete of the Opera house cowers behind its glass atrium. But these buildings illustrate that modernism was about social *civic* utopia, and not just a misguided attempt to engineer a new architectural class society.

Modernism looked forward as well as up, and it looked across. Everywhere, it sought to supply a new dynamism to towns and cities. It did this through practical planning, but also through the aesthetic dreams of new dwelling possibilities. The dwelling would not just be the house in which you lived, as now you would dwell in an integrated city, where transport, culture, shared new building(s), plazas, walkways, subways, footpaths, carparks would signal mobility as the future. Concrete would inspire a sense of dwelling as future-oriented. Many recognize that modernism may have had utopian hopes, and that these were thwarted by financial corner cutting when it came to city centres and to mass housing projects, but there is still a strong tendency to imagine that the prospect of a utopia through building is inherently misguided. Some might see a continuity between a now-exploded 1970s tower block and the aggressive antisociality of the Elysian, as they both share a desire not to be beholden to the surrounding, pre-existing context. This is entirely wrong: the Elysian is the strongest repudiation of all modernism, and stands for a fear and hatred for communal urban society. It is the antithesis of the dynamism imagined by Futurists, the ecologies of Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus as avant-garde model. It seems superficially to be a bit like the attenuation of modernism that is the International style of concrete, glass and altitude, but even in that context, the Elysian has arrived too late, and is the exact opposite of any style, however minimal. It is 68 metres of bungalow.

Given the bad reputation of high rise apartment blocks, it might seem surprising that Le Corbusier, the most arch of modernist architects, saw the practice of architecture as profoundly human. The modern movement would need to reckon with technological advance, and increased mobility, and for Le Corbusier this offered precisely the potential for finally having an architecture, or an urbanism, that respected the human scale. For Le Corbusier, architecture had never yet been humanist. The building of dwellings, for example, had divided into massive mansions for some, with multiple functions, official buildings that loomed powerfully, and

then other smaller structures that only allowed the existence of bare life, akin to pig sheds. Urban environments had been designed to exclude the masses. So, however problematic the realization of modernist architectural dreams would prove, the initial mission was one of levelling. Up. Where the 17th century Diggers sought to assert the right of the poor to the land of England, Le Corbusier claimed the right of all to light, domestic machinery, green land outside the tower block and mass transit to a city centre full of cultural improvement(s).

With the advent of postmodernist architecture in the 1970s, and its call away from modernist order, Le Corbusier's concept of a 'machine for living' (machine à habiter) fell into disrepute as being a vehicle of alienation. In fact, the idea was about establishing the conditions for any apartment dweller to have access to efficient space that would increase the living area, and improve the practical parts of life, such as cooking or washing, as well as an aestheticization of the everyday for everyone in the form of interior design and external views. Furthermore, the idea of building on a human scale was encapsulated in the figure of 'the modulor', an update of da Vinci's 'Vitruvian man', an expression of Renaissance rethinking of harmony through geometry and arithmetical sequence. All building, thought Le Corbusier, could use the modulor as a building block, and all would end up harmoniously constructed if done on that basis. Of course, a few isolated blocks far from town with no reference point except the one bus into the city is not a good advertisement for this idea, but the idea was there, and can be seen in the *cité radieuse* (1948-54) in Marseille, and in other variants that were built and that did not result in a social dystopian nightmare.

The radiant block would be only part of the *ville radieuse*, the radiant or radiating city—full of light, but also built around planned spokes of outward-circling building and infrastructure. Our Elysian, like so much of international tower building since the 1990s, has no part in a social or human mission, and neither can it advocate a critical position. All it can do is dominate. Nothing radiates from it, but it does expand into lower rise companion buildings, as if in recognition of the need to hook back in to its surroundings. It carries nothing of the utopianism of modernist architecture, but it

does have the failed part—its apartness, and its literalization of the rejection of tower living evidenced in its emptiness. As stated above, this emptiness will never become heroic or tragic, it will just be a phase on the way to the Elysian becoming the most ordinary of buildings, and a neat figuration of how a 'show home' can operate through first removing all buyers, making itself unbuyable, and then only finally, when all the hype about the 'elysian' of the Elysian goes away, actually be occupied.

V. Atmosphere

The Elysian is an emptiness than cannot even sustain the sacrificial role of the emptying of the economy. It can barely represent this fleecing, as it has so little to it, it is so free of meaning. The keen of eye will have noticed, however, that the concept of representation has yet to make an appearance, and that this is a building that even empty of so many things, is full of its name. The tower 'of' Babel was brought low by YHWH to undo many aspects of human endeavour, not least for aiming high, for attempting to reach 'the high', 'but incontestably for [the builders] having wanted thus to *make a name for themselves*, to give themselves the name, to construct for and by themselves their own name, to gather themselves there' (Derrida, 'Des tours de Babel,' 195). The name of the tower 'of' Babel is not known, until it became babel, the name of its destruction, its un-naming. In the case of the Elysian, any vengeful God (as embodied, maybe, in the invisible hand that empties) will have to strip away the name.

Before we strip it away, before the tower's mundanity reveals itself, its name needs to be heard in the fullness of its rich and subtle misdirection of the hero in search of the life beyond. The Elysian fields, or Elysium, is where heroes from classical Greek stories would go after death, opening up a prospect for all, of an afterlife of pleasure as reward for virtuous living. It will be only too obvious that whilst modernism never had the specific hubris of using the idea of the elysian to bribe its tenants, this building that so strongly resists the concept of equality (no social housing, no urban regeneration) vaunts itself as a delivery system to these heavenly realms. The strongest claims in this regard were made before the

building was complete, as billboards around the site showed to the groveling denizens of Cork the skyward looks of the future people looking up and dreaming, dreaming, of just one day, one day maybe, living up above those panels, high, or at least slightly high, above the traffic that would swarm around them. The apparently moronic use of classic mythology, or indeed, a transferable mythologeme, is more interesting, more subtly rectifying of the name it borrows. Like cladding.

The Elysian fields of the Greeks lay to the West, and/or ahead in time. Elysium would be a place out of time, out of this place, but still in a place. Either way, movement would be required, and this movement would be lateral: to an other place, or to live on, in an other life, after this one. So, like modernism, the concept of the Elysian field was a radiation from now into the future, into new realms. This new realm would be boundless, an escape from the tyranny of limited locatedness. So we can see how a new housing development would latch on to this idea, and use it to suggest to people with some very specific combination of awareness of literary reference and gullibility that here, in this tower, now, boundlessness awaited. Gravity would fall away as your economic success would find its reward a few meters above the ground.

Before rushing to judge this so apt monument to its time, let us note the curious shift that has happened to the Elysian concept. In the past, the Elysian lay ahead, or lay to the West. Now, no such displacement is necessary, as paradise can be erected, right here, right now, and with its baggage stripped away. That it also could not host anyone in this exciting new dimensionality is not very relevant, as the key thing is that the Elysian lies above. It is upward. Even *high* modernism could not muster such stunning literalism (probably because architects like Le Corbusier were highly literate in classical European thinking). Even the triumphalism of a succession of rulers of France could not alter the tiny gradient of the Parisian Champs Elysées, which heads west and outward.

So, the Elysian changes the dimension of the thing it refers to, it makes a vertical of what was either (or both) a horizontal or an after. In this, it is highly contemporary, but what it taps into is not a re-appropriation or reinvigoration of the utopian or messianic part of the idea of Elysium. Instead, this building is accidentally part of a

critique of the capitalist dream of success at the expense of others. Elysium has proved to be exclusionary, which maybe we all knew, but it was only in this century that the word 'elysian' came to mean elitist, gated community living. The extreme, but not outlying, version of this can be seen in *Elysium* (2013), where the extremely wealthy live in Elysium, a spaceship that wheels away above the ecologically and economically ravaged Earth, which it strips for resources and service employees. It would be interesting, in a way, to see the Elysian take this tack (some say that is what it tried in its advertising), and for it to attract only those who thought they could leave everyone else behind while those left behind paid for someone else's privilege. But this metaphor surely could not apply to existing situations. To summarize, to bring it low and high at once, in analytical reading and lofty metaphor alike, the Elysian has come too late to its 'timeless' symbol of the Elysian field—it is now only parodically an aspiration that either all could hope for, or that all could wish on a meritocratic group. The time of the Elysian is not just that of the end, but of the not-quite-ending, and this is what takes it into the vacuousness of the epic attempts to repurpose large scale building as something other or less than, something abject in relation to, architecture.

VI. The Confining Joy

Derrida writes of the colossus (in *The Truth in Painting*), the attempt to match the sublime in stone that was regularly made by ancient Greek culture, and that always fell just short. In fact, this was or is the best that can be hoped for, to be not quite, not yet, or no longer. The building of epic statuary represented the realm of the superior beings, and in realizing them, diminished their awesomeness. The materialization is the end of the realm beyond, above, and its replacement as not quite itself, always less. The sublime, as read through Immanuel Kant by Derrida, has to be the always-bigger, that which is beyond understanding. That which is beyond understanding then becomes 'the thing that is beyond understanding' and capable of empowering the act of reasoning once more. I think that by now it should be clear that if the Elysian falls short it does so in a way so unspectacular that it is in the realm

of the not-even not-quite, but we cannot exclude the possibility that its striving to gird the world from its derisory erection could one day be seen as a true expression of the not-quite, as opposed to the not-even-close it currently barely attains.

So, in sadness, we need to turn from the blinding prospect of the sublime, acknowledging that somewhere the built world can feasibly touch at least the lower part of the frame of the sky of sublimity (for Kant, the sublime would best be seen in the forms of nature, but he did include the pyramids of Egypt as a possible source of sublime inspiration). The failure of the Elysian in this regard is not its properly pathetic height, but its being not-quite-anything in its functioning. So, the turn can be completed with the slotting into view of the concept of junkspace, as theorized by architect Rem Koolhaas in his article of that name. In this piece, Koolhaas moves beyond the slightly simplistic idea of the 'non-place' that Marc Augé wrote about in his 1995 book of that name, referring to supermarkets, airports, plazas—in short, a contemporary world structured around mobility. Perhaps recognizing that Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio had had better versions of these ideas already, Koolhaas simply incorporates the non-space of the managed transit zone into his idea of junkspace. The voids of transit form part of a bigger whole where planning, design, economics and culture lose their way in spaces condensed or contained in fatuous sub-modernist building(s):

The built […] product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout. Modernization had a rational program: to share the blessings of science, universally. Junkspace is its apotheosis, or meltdown… Although its individual parts are the outcome of brilliant inventions, lucidly planned by human intelligence, boosted by infinite computation, their sum spells the end of Enlightenment, its resurrection as farce, a low-grade purgatory… ('Junkspace', 175)

Koolhaas's own experimentation in building has taken him far from modernism, but his writing and his practice are properly post-

modern, a reworking of the modernist drive that recognizes the potential for excess that modernism unleashed, sometimes consciously, at other times unwittingly. For this reason, he is particularly struck by how the resuscitation of modernist height is so different in intent, so much less, so much emptying, and in the end, just so much shit.

All managerial space falls into the category of junkspace, but so does hubristic 'signature' building—sports stadia left empty, art galleries designed to be enjoyed empty, endless repetitions of commercial 'offers', reiterations of 'authentic' spaces that in resisting the dominant trend can only work if the clients of the particular service node have never travelled and have lost the ability to guess that your innovative bar has been landed from a passing air transport, seeding cities and towns everywhere with a limited range of micro-convolutions of the same. Maybe not everyone reading this will have seen the Elysian, so just to be clear, this is a building that despite its advertising, has not the slightest wish to singularity in its form or function. Instead it is the now classic mixed-use location encouraged by governments intent on flattening function even as it helps raise form. And so destroys form, as a building without function has lost its form. Koolhaas reminds us of this basic precept, never more strongly held than in the hands of modernist builders, that form seeks function. Junkspace, however, keeps searching, clueless as to what it is supposed to be for, other than to suggest that it is for *something*, a functionality without use, or indeed, uselessness, 'its contents are stagnant, recycled or multiplied as in cloning: forms search for function like hermit crabs looking for a vacant shell' ('Junkspace,' 178).

The Elysian dreams of finding these shells, its shell continually repurposed as it searches occupants, looking for a crab to live a solitary enclosed life within its confines. This repurposing has mostly consisted of being empty, and therefore suggesting its malleability (the true sign of junkspace). Junkspace tends to arise in big structures, many of which rise high, some even higher than the Elysian. It is cumulative, one floor after another, flexible, open, hopeful. Like an art show where identical artworks are allocated different prices, there is a price rise according to size and elevation of apartment (even when empty, we cannot pretend there is no

attempt at function here), as if this pricing would guarantee the value of the enterprise.

This is not about value, and in a way that is not even tragic, the Elysian does not even have economic value. One day it will, as does all space in urban environments. One day the plaza-ette next to it will be a thriving hub of business chatter and bustle. One day, the rising will come, and the building will rise to match its own height, fitting into its modest ambition. The meaning of the building has long since gone, its dreams of utopia a sad travesty of history. One day, someone will cover the building, although it might be cheaper to knock it down, 'improve' it, like the fate of most Cork modernism. One day, it will reach the status of a place people live in. One day, it will not be empty, and that will be its final emptiness. Devoid not only of initial intent, it lived on regardless of its fellow boomscrapers' non-appearance, only to tumble into being not even terrible.

That is how it will end, in its beginning, as dwelling, as a not quite hollowed out space. Its managerialist flexibility, along with its ideological and desperate claims in its brochure, will fade. In the end, the ghost of its beginning will haunt the Elysian, and this haunting will turn on itself, the ghost will fade, and we will have a tower with no beginning, not-ending.

(no beginning + not ending) = not ending

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The Part

James Cummins

of or returning to
the remembrance
of the river—vast—
a real grass land
I see orchards of delight
I see this place
the nature of we
ourselves too
transcendent
nothing can be—rare—
these figures
swarm
ghosts of men
speaking
in terms of poets
one leading
the others
to hell

White Legs Disappearing

Cal Doyle

the sun shone as it had to on | eighteen floors of sparkling glass which | are reverently passionately waiting | sometimes quietly weeping | for the miraculous birth | where you cannot be seen | while someone else is eating or | the splash the forsaken cry | of passion charisma style | *le mot juste* | where the dogs go on | anyhow | how everything turns away quite leisurely | a passionate affair this living | opening a window | one of several hundred | just walking dully along | below | the white legs disappearing into the green | slowly evaporating | the graceless erasures | skating on a pond | about suffering | take plastic | their doggy life | when the aged | want it to happen | its human position | how well they understood | they were never wrong | how | a boy falling out of the sky had | now | somewhere to get to | and the torturer's horse | forgot that even the dreadful | who did not specially | and anyway | that | martyrdom must run its course | before it | scratches its innocent | untidy spot | from the disaster | the old masters | how | the ploughman may have heard | in a corner some | Icarus for instance | and the expensive delicate ship | at the edge of the wood they never | must have seen something amazing | efface | (there must always be children) | how it takes place | and sail calmly on

The Tower

Fergal Gaynor

We could, I suppose,
knock it—
then rebuild,
downward,

past where
bandoned desirables wait the
promised return;

past where
daily alarums rolled motorised
columns, centreward, restarting
commerce, keeping dull
occupation;

past where
flat roofs made plastic the
sunny ideal, wide asphalt let
cruise the new-minted steel;

past where
bronze, uniformed head,
proportioned to the public park,
oversaw black action, the lost,
green what-might-have-been;

past where
citizenry again made exhibition
of self, rising to familiars in
imperial glass;

past where
Boole's buildings sizing, from

45 to 49, the rational road took
toll quotient, gate arrivals
counted all their bones;

past where
meaty dividends raised rich
piles, off-isle, high, dry, aweigh
from wick'd smell, guttural
hands, low tidal draughts;

past where
Mangan's four-faced metre
failed, at steeple's foot, to levy,
with unsolemn clang, the
levelled Mahony;

past where
the little courses culverted, and
the great, estate was extended,
ishka fay holluv laid over, by
mall, parade and street;

past where
Coppinger cross of the
gentrified chief, close courser of
planters, marauded by
mortgage;

past where
the virgin's privateers, energetic
undertakers, divided gentle
land and upstart bodies, setting
star form over wandering flood;

past where
stories of London tower decked
in silks a landloping ape;

past where
portable Rome for port
opportune, for aedification, had
set stone boot;

past where
the netted hostman, Barry's
bondsman, tracked seafarers,
speckled and flash;

past where
monastery managed, so
Munster developed;

past where
river's solvent lees stored small
charge, counts half-gotten,
horns of ould potency;

past where
stone forecasts raised the sun,
gone under world's end of the
western road;

to probe
through all-forgiving depths,
the guileless earth,

to stone,

wine-dark, steel grey, green as the wrack
wreathed waters,

waiting, to be lifted, high into human air,

singular, demonstrative,

and not

before

time.

Antigonal

Sarah Hayden

holed up. shot down
& nursing
something suppurating.

fulminating against the self.

wraproud autocue.
lean back. shallow deck.
seasonlong lockdown.

beslippered. be silent. be as you were
pre revelation.

the letters that come
make no sense
now.
and language ever is strangening.

if you must ask about words
appearing nightly on walls
enquire only of the ignorant.

skirt it extravagantly.
as though 'twere tulle.
swing wide and ample round the [()]

& look not upon it.
place pegs judiciously.
make like the animal ascendant
crawling out of its own shookloose skin.

the suck lifts only when sightlines twang.

partake in nothing you find there. do not dance.

never know your own left shoulder but show your back to the rising.

as phototropism succumbs, future-foul, send your gaze elsewhere

& if you would hear it, let it be through the feet.
let that worked meat hold the vibrations
even though the aspic quiver.
al/ways keep the vertebrae licked, the arteries clear.
it is emergent, see.

The Meat Queue

David Toms

Letná plain
planes & lines
a metronome
stops & starts

blade-bent time
counts shift
from left
from left
to right

in Cork
buildings
don't dance

here Stalin stood
hands in pockets
reaching to feed
the meat queue

the moldau moulds
the light
where a cat crawls through a hole
/caving/

in Cork
an empty plinth
awaits

Sole Occupant

Victoria Kennefick

It was fun at first, cycling his new bike down a corridor
thick as a secondary road while below the city glistered,
a million pin tops catching light, tacking streets together
so they hemmed the darting river.

At weekends, in his queen-sized bed,
there was sometimes a perfumed body;
more often he lay alone,
an obedient needle pointing due north.

When window cleaners descended
the tower's body, he followed them to every floor.
Observed ropes and pulleys, heard the slap
of body parts bouncing against glass.

\There was no one else there\

Now he dreams of the giant figures trapped
on hoardings that ribbon the base of the tower;
their expressions frozen, sentences in *Arial*
hovering above them where sky should be:

He couldn't look away, (the man on cardboard stock still, smart-shirted, gazing into the middle distance or, at seventeen storeys).

Had she discovered Ireland's biggest secret? (Fingers pyramid around her paper mouth, terror in her Photoshop-blue eyes.)

He presses his forehead against the cold pane,
spotlights so bright they block shadow, blind him;
his bicycle ticks in the marble hall, spokes spin
like a demented compass. Below another hoarding promises,

This will change everything.

The narrow streets are oily, the Lee full
(it all unravels
when it reaches sea). Sand bags
camouflage the city's sharp edges.

Closer to heaven than anywhere else,

He can't see the ground and wonders just how far the fall.

Rachel Warriner

Raise hope, a range
a fear of heights
in replica
towers. Gleaming,
hoping, ready.
Wealthy parents,
double aspect,
first major test.
Greater heights last
overall, that
park podium
outdoing our
spectacle, that
liberty hall.
There are no less
similar schemes.
Chase overshoots.

Safe as Houses

Susan Tomaselli

Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology.

—Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project*

In John Cheever's 'The Enormous Radio,' Irene Westcott objects to the replacement console her husband brings home: 'She was struck at once with the physical ugliness of the large gumwood cabinet. Irene was proud of her living room, she had chosen its furnishings and colors as carefully as she chose her clothes, and now it seemed to her that the new radio stood among her intimate possessions like an aggressive intruder.' The new radio begins to pick up interference, first static from the building—'doorbells, elevator bells, electric razors, and Waring mixers'—then voices from the other apartment dwellers. (As I read, I recall the transmissions in Jean Cocteau's film *Oprhée*—'Where could they be coming from? No other station broadcasts them. I feel certain they are addressed to me personally.') We eavesdrop on melancholy monologues, bitter quarrels, dirty dialogues, 'demonstrations of indigestion, carnal love, abysmal vanity, faith, and despair,' the humdrum noise of the utterly quotidian. We compellingly turn the dial.

Through the technology of the transistor, Cheever niftily brings us over the threshold and into the interior lives of the '12th floor East Seventies between Fifth and Madison Avenues' residents. The Westcotts, Cheever tells us, are the 'kind of people who seem to strike that satisfactory average of income, endeavour, and respectability that is reached by the statistical reports in college alumni bulletins.' They are comfortably middle-class, the American equivalents of Robert Laing in British science-fiction writer of the almost-normal J.G. Ballard's *High-Rise* (or David Markham in *Millennial People*, Paul and Jane Sinclair in *Super-Cannes*). Ballard mined what he termed 'inner space,' an imaginary realm in which the outer world of reality meets and merges with the inner world of the mind, the terrain we see around us in everyday life and in our

homes, our psychological space.

In 1974, Ballard told an Canadian television programme that it was the writer's task to invent reality, that we already lived inside an enormous novel. Writers are no longer required to dream, because the world produces its own extreme fictions. 'I think we have seen the invasion of almost every aspect of our lives by fictions of one kind or another. We see this in people's homes—the way they furnish their houses and apartments.' Ballard was fascinated with the modernist architecture of Le Corbusier (who famously said houses were machines to live in), with the paradigmatic landscapes of late twentieth-century suburban life, well-defined with the same amenities, architecture, three-storeyed office blocks, slip roads. 'I feel that a modern high-rise building, or concrete seven-storey car park, or a cloverleaf roadway junction, reflects and embraces within itself all the aesthetic laws of good design that we apply to the sorts of things we regard as beautiful in our lives, like well-designed cutlery and kitchen equipment. They embrace all the aesthetic standards of modern sculpture.'

These obsessions are worked through to compelling end results in Ballard's urban disaster triptych *Crash*, *Concrete Island*, and particularly *High-Rise,* with its jarring opening: 'Later, as he sat on his balcony eating the dog, Dr Robert Laing reflected on the unusual events that had taken place within this huge apartment building during the previous three months. Now that everything had returned to normal, he was surprised that there had been no obvious beginning, no point beyond which their lives had moved into a clearly more sinister dimension.'

The high-rise of Ballard's 1975 novel reaches forty floors containing one thousand apartments, and is organised by social strata as we've come to expect: a penthouse on the top floor, with units decreasing in size, and prestige, on the lower levels. (In Roman times, the least desirable living quarters in apartments, or *insula* [island], were on the top floor. 'Behold the mansions towering site/Where the floors on floors to the tenth storey rise,' Juvenal wrote.) The upper floors of this vertical city offered subtle anonymity and total privacy to a discreet oligarchy of entrepreneurs and exclusive residents, including the building's architect Anthony Royal, for the rest it provided a perfect background into which

occupants could merge invisibly. Says Ballard, 'the high-rise was a huge machine designed to serve, not the collective body of tenants, but the individual resident insolation.' To paraphrase Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, the high-rise knows all your emotions, all your desires, 'it is the interior of Big Brother's belly.'

Ballard, shocking in his neutral style, writes:

> The more arid and affectless life became in the high-rise, the greater the possibilities it offered. By its very efficiency, the high-rise took over the task of maintaining the social structure that supported them all. For the first time it removed the need to repress every kind of anti-social behaviour, and left them free to explore any deviant or wayward impulses. It was precisely in these areas that the most important and most interesting aspects of their lives would take place. Secure within the shell of the high-rise like passengers on board an automatically piloted airliner, they were free to behave in any way they wished, explore the darkest corners they could find. In many ways, the high-rise was a model of all that technology had done to make possible the expression of a truly 'free' psychopathology. (Ballard, 2014: 36)

Le Corbusier had misread human nature. His vision of a 'well mapped-out scheme, constructed on a mass-production basis, can give a feeling of calm, order and neatness, and inevitably imposes discipline on the inhabitants.' But there is no inevitable link between rational design and disciplined living. Ballard's high-rise offers more than enough opportunities for violence and confrontation, and as Robert Laing discovers (echoing Jane Jacob's concerns in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*), 'people in high-rises tended not to care about tenants more than two floors below them' (in Jacob's case tall buildings segregate residents from their streets, they're oblivious to street life beneath them). Tellingly, fellow high-rise resident and filmmaker Wilder, who's making a documentary about high-rises and the physical and psychological pressures of living in one, refers at one point to the luxury building as a 'glorified tenement,' a 'hanging palace self-seeding its intrigues and

destruction.'

Rem Koolhaas's 2001 manifesto, *Junkspace*, on the 'consumerist transformation of city and suburb,' is Ballardian in its scope. 'Junkspace,' being 'what remains after modernisation has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernisation is in progress, its fallout,' is an architecture of assemblage, a response to, or apotheosis of, the vertiginous elevations of Modernism. 'Like radioactive waste,' Koolhaas writes, 'Junkspace has an insidious half-life. Ageing in Junkspace is nonexistent or catastrophic; sometimes an entire Junkspace—a department store, a nightclub, a bachelor pad—turns into a slum overnight without warning: wattage diminishes imperceptibly, letters drop out of signs, air-conditioning units start dripping, cracks appear as if from otherwise unregistered earthquakes; sections rot, are no longer viable, but remain joined to the flesh of the main body via gangrenous passages.'

Ballard's high-rise is moribund, the building starts to disintegrate, its vital functions fade one by one. Plunged into darkness, elevators stranded in shafts, the air-conditioning ceases to function while transistors blare through open apartment doors. With garbage heaped outside doors, stairwells littered with broken glass, luminous paint aerosoled across walls, the residents begin a slow psychological avalanche that carrys them downwards, to a state of happy primitivism.

As you would expect with Ballard, there is a sexual element to the anti-social antics of the residents: 'Not for the first time Laing reflected that he and his neighbours were eager for trouble as the most effective means of enlarging their sex lives.' Ballard, who said that 'sex times technology equals the future,' saw a new textbook of psychopathology being written. In a posthumous collection of interviews, *Extreme Metaphors*, he fleshes this idea out: 'What we're getting is a whole new order of sexual fantasies, involving a different set of experiences, like car crashes, like travelling in jet aircraft, the whole overlay of new technologies, architecture, interior design, communications, transport, merchandising.' Parallel in subject matter to Ballard's novel, though more extreme in sexual content, is David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (aka *They Came From Within*). Set in a gated community on an island off Montreal, a paradise for young

professionals, we soon discover all is not as it should be for the well-to-do residents of Starliner Towers. As their behaviour becomes more disruptive through invasive parasites, Cronenberg relishes breaking social, economic and sexual conventions—'Everything is erotic. Everything is sexual … even dying is an act of eroticism,' says one character—to slowly reveal that, in fact, it is the building that is the 'monster,' shadowing something Helen Wilder says in *High-Rise*: 'It's not really the other residents. It's the building…' (Cronenberg would go on to direct *Crash*, one of Ballard's most sexually extreme novels, a paraphiliac text where a group of people take pleasure from car crashes and the resulting horrific injuries, attacked by film critic Alexander Walker as 'a movie beyond depravity… some of the most perverted acts and theories of sexual deviance I have ever seen propagated in mainline cinema').

Various attempts have been made to translate *High-Rise* onto film—Paul Mayersberg, Nicolas Roeg, Vincenzo Natali—but Ben Wheatley, experimental auteur responsible for *A Field in England*, is in post-production at the time of writing. His version gives the luxury high-rise a name: The Elysium.

Close in Ballard to psychic dissonance and domestic discord, are Roman Polanski's 'apartment trilogy' of *Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *The Tenant*, a 1976 adaptation of later-day Surrealist Roland Topor's novel of the same name. Trelkovsky (played by Polanski himself) takes a room—two gloomy rooms, in fact—in a Parisian building, 'no kitchen. A single window in the back room looked directly out on an oddly shaped oval window in the wall on the other side of a courtyard.' The apartment is 'covered with a yellowish paper on which there were now several large stains, caused by dampness. The whole ceiling seemed covered with a network of tiny cracks, spreading out and crossing each other like the veins of a leaf. Little bits of plaster which had fallen from it cracked beneath their shoes.' 'The tenant who used to live here threw herself out the window,' Trelkovsky's concierge gleefully tells him, 'Look, you can see where she fell.' As Trelkovsky is to find out, the other residents plot to destroy him, to slowly transform him into the suicide victim Simone Choule. 'Using a thousand shabby little tricks, an unceasing vigilance, and an iron determination, they were altering his whole personality.'

As Ballard's luxury apartment block was a 'Pandora's box whose thousand lids were opening,' provocations trivial enough but amplified by deep-rooted class antagonisms, so Polanski's apartment is a microcosm of Seventies French social malaise, the immigrant becomes the subject of fear. Through the use of *mise-en-scène*, recurring expressionist and surrealist motifs, as well as references to Egyptian iconography, Polanski amplifies a man's growing identity crisis and descent into hell. Mirrors multiply Trelkovsky's reflection misdirecting the viewer on his real image, while his window frames and screens his mental projections. Polanski's *The Tenant* apparently 'infected' Primo Levi with the will to commit suicide a short time after watching it.

Edward Hopper's figures are often seen peering through windows, curiously gazing into the world. His paintings of vernacular spaces, familiar and ordinary, are transformed by Hopper to a synthesis of theatricality and domesticity. Other times we look in on Hopper's world, through windows at night, upper-story bedrooms glimpsed from elevated trains. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* hinges on residents looking out from their private world and into another, the half-stories in Hopper's *Night Windows, Room in New York*, paintings of isolation and boredom brought to chilling and violent conclusions. James Stewart's character is, as one critic observed, 'in love with the occupation of photography, and becomes completely absorbed in reconstructing the images he has seen through his lens.' Of our voyeuristic tendencies, Ludwig Wittgenstein noted, 'there can be nothing stranger than observing a person during his everyday pursuits, when he believes that no one is observing him. Let us imagine a theatre with its curtain rising to reveal a person alone in a room, walking back and forth, lighting a cigarette, sitting down etc. We would suddenly see this person from the outside in a way that we can never otherwise see him—as if we would see a chapter of a biography, as it were, with our own eyes. This would be awful, and at the same time, more miraculous than anything a poet could make people act or speak on the stage.'[i] French experimental writer Georges Perec uses a similar tack in *Life: A User's Manual*, a novel which describes all the objects in a seven-storey (plus a cellar and two attic rooms) building, and hence the inner lives of Winckler, Bartebooth, Valène and the other residents

of 11 Rue Simon-Crubellier. Perec used an architect's drawing depicting the front elevation of a Parisian townhouse. 'I imagine a Parisian apartment building whose façade has been removed… so that all the rooms in the front, from the ground floor up to the attics, are instantly and simultaneously visible.'

Standing square on and looking at a high-rise is not dissimilar to unspooling a roll of film—cinematic or photographic—the windows on the building are natural substitutes for frames. German photographer Rut Blees Luxemburg's *A Modern Project* series captures that urban transitory nocturnal landscape that is both mythical and unconscious. Devoid of human presence, and lit only by the amber haze of streetlamps, her London scenes take on an uncanny dimension. Open-air car parks, abandoned office buildings, empty sports grounds, concrete landscapes built not for man, but for man's absence—and given titles like 'Caliban Towers,' 'Vertiginous Exhilaration,' 'Corporate Leisure,' 'Silverblade'—it's tempting to call her large-scale streetscapes Ballardian. Perhaps her most famous image is one called 'Towering Inferno,' used by The Streets for the cover of their album *Original Pirate Material.* Like the textual collages of T. S. Eliot ('One thinks of all the hands/That are raising dingy shades/In a thousand furnished rooms') based on the phantasmagorias of city life, Luxemburg repurposes the junk of modernity where 'its ambitions and its poetic and real failures are recast as potential.'

British musical movements like Merseybeat, Punk, Madchester, and Britpop found virtue in their squalid surroundings, bringing a seedy glitz to alleyways, tower blocks, underpasses, and recasting the city as an echo chamber. Blur's 'Best Days' celebrates the Brutalist splendour of Ernö Goldfinger's Ladbroke Grove tower block ('Trellick Tower's been calling'), an architect so hated by Ian Fleming he appropriated the name for a Bond villain. Pulp's track 'Sheffield Sex City'[ii] name-checks the notorious Park Hill ('the things we saw: everyone on Park Hill came in unison at 4.13 AM and the whole block fell down'), a housing estate said to have been inspired by Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation.* Architectural autodidact Ian Nairn visited in the Sixties, not long after completion, and wrote: 'The experience of housing a number of people really close to the city centre, and in one vast but

comprehensible scheme, has paid off in a sense of community and initiative which is very heartening … from outside the flats look terrifying; towering slabs form a wall half a mile long, with fantastically busy surface patterns and drab colours which will not darken gracefully as the scarlet bricks of the old slum terraces did.' Park Hill became Europe's largest listed building in 1998, preserved for future generations as a reminder of 'the community spirit of traditional slum streets.' Still, it was voted in 2005 in a television programme, *Demolition*, one of the top twelve buildings the public would most like to see torn down. I wonder what fate belies The Elysian.

When Ballard wrote *High-Rise* in the Seventies, public opinion toward the Macmillan government's giant urban towers had shifted from being the crowning glory of the new welfare state, to mass-produced 'slums in the sky.' In *Estates*, Lynsey Hanley spoke to a retired architect for Liverpool council who recalled a visit by Le Corbusier when he was a student: 'All the students looked up to him as a kind of idol. We saw what he was doing as a way of changing society. We wanted everything to be of very good quality, you see, so Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* seemed to be a great idea to begin with, but you're going to have an awful lot of people living way up there [he pointed upwards], and most people don't want to live way up there. It's a psychological thing. Also, the psychology of having great glass windows in these blocks is drastic for some people. They don't feel safe' (Hanley: 103-4).

Our experience of high living in Ireland is as negative as England's: Divis Tower in Belfast (the top floor doubled up as a British military listening post), and Ballymun in Dublin. 'I remember how the central shopping area,' Karl Whitney writes in *Hidden City*, 'was surrounded on all sides by a bulwark of concrete tower blocks—then a unique sight in Ireland. (From a distance, the towers resembled a circular pagan tomb.) There were seven fifteen-storey towers, each named after one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, and nineteen eight-storey "spine blocks," built in the 1960s to supply council housing for Dublin's rising population and to accommodate those cleared from inner-city slums. Over the years, the area acquired a reputation for crime and drug use—ills that were attributed, in some quarters, to high-rise living.'

Dutch photographer Willem Heefer documented Ballymun's demolition between 2006 and 2009, in his ghostly *Dublin Flats* sequence. ('I see seven towers/But I only see one way out'). Like Luxemburg's photographs, Heefer's series is absent of people, though unlike Luxemburg's—where we know the residents are there, obscured from our view by curtains—there are no signs of life in Heefer's: they have been cleared of tenants in preparation for their impending destruction. ('Are the towers of our souls razed for all time?' Gaston Bachelard asked. 'Are we to remain, to quote Gérard de Nerval's famous line, beings whose "towers have been destroyed"?'). Internal symmetrical rooms, stripped of furniture and personal belongings—shells—are replicated in grids, the buildings rendered less a habitable architecture, and more an intriguing medley of geometries. The tower blocks photographed on the outside are tightly cropped, and so become mere patterns, bringing to mind close-ups of the anarchic buildings of the Walled City of Kowloon, Hong Kong, one of the planet's densest urban slums before it was torn down in 1993.

Developers instinctively flatten a site, start from scratch—a tabula rasa—but cities are built on top of cities, all the spaces have been occupied before. Reading Charles Dickens, gentrification has been a part of urban life for years, but he spins a cautionary tale: '…we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.' 'In a sense,' Ballard wrote, 'life in the high-rise had begun to resemble the world outside—there were the same ruthlessness and aggression concealed within a set of polite conventions.'

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[i] Translated from the Finnish, and quoted in Perez-Gomez: 212.

[ii] The song opens with a reading from Nancy Friday's My Secret Garden: 'We were living in a big block of flats with a central courtyard. All the bedroom windows in the building opened onto this court, and sometimes in the middle of the night, in that building it sounded like a mass orgy. I may have been only eleven, but no-one had to tell me what all that moaning and yelling was about. I'd lie there mesmerised, listening to the first couple.'

Túr na Baoise

Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh

D'aithin an faoileán féin
túr na baoise
is é ar eitleog.

Staon damháin alla
ó líon a shníomhadh
sna cúinní bréag-ghalánta.

Shiúil cat fiáin thart
ar an ngairdín Seapánach
is thug cúl le cine.

Chruinnigh na francaigh sa bhforhalla
is nocht a gcuid fiacla
le teann déistine nó gliondair.

D'aithin an faoileán féin
túr na baoise
is do chac anuas air.

"Skycrapers are Gay"[i]

Jennifer Matthews

Used to be you didn't see them in public—
they'd keep themselves to themselves.
Some said they just didn't exist.
Why would you need a skyscraper
when a bungalow would do?
Or if you need to spread out
a two-up, two-down with just enough
room for two kids. Maybe three.
A bit of a garden out the back
with an apple tree, bleeding hearts,
lily of the valley. A shed for keeping sharp
or rusted tools—a place
for the man of the house to lock
himself in with silence.
Used to be, if there was a skyscraper in your parish
it would collapse all its floors like an accordion
sighing down as the air was squeezed out
making itself into a decent foundation
for a public house or GAA club.
And everyone knew what was underneath.
And the right thing was to quietly let it be.
Nowadays they just impose themselves on a city
sticking up so tall that everyone can see
that modern gleam making old things look shabby.
And of course when one comes, others follow.
I'll tell you what skyscrapers are like.
They're like a woman who won't take off her big hat at a wedding.
They're like the loudest child in the Christmas play.
They're like the tower of Babel,
or is it Jacob's ladder? Imagine!
The boldness of building your way to the heavens.
As if you had the right.
As if someone was calling you up.

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[i] Graffiti outside The Elysian construction site.

To the Last Drop

Billy O'Callaghan

Back in April, when the shining skin was finally peeled away and the truth, the reality, had begun to heave like vomit to the surface, James started contemplating ends. Bad nights followed, the window full of the South Link's yellow darkness, the bedroom and living room flushed with it, a bruised jaundice staining everything, every gleaming surface, and the phone would ring at random small hours, its mean shriek going the full twelve rounds, swinging combination punches into the wall of silence before the machine clicked in to grab and hold the message. Sometimes there was only a void, yawning open across several racing heartbeats. Other nights the recording gathered in either the choked, riven sound of weeping, or some viciously uttered threat: of a dark alleyway, or a bullet waiting to destroy his face, or how it was going to feel for him to have his tongue cut out, his balls cut off, his head beaten in with the hook end of a claw hammer. And once, only once but even that one time feeling like too much, a voice that laid itself out slowly, broiled in rage, hatred a tremor running like veins within the words.

'Walsh? Are you there, you fucking scumbag? I know you're listening. So hear this: I wish the world's pain on you. Five kinds of cancer for anyone you've ever loved, and I hope you live into long old age alone and made limp with leprosy of the asshole. May every bite of food you ever take again reek with the shit of all the poor bastards you've screwed over and destroyed.'

The calls always came late, well into the small hours, cleaving apart the stillness. And already awake and sitting up at the kitchen table, or hunched forward and cold in one of the living-room armchairs because lying flat affected his breathing on the nights when he knew there'd be no sleep going and his heart had begun to pound, he'd listen, the tendons of his body drawn taut, afraid to move or to even swallow. Through the bedroom's open door, Valerie lay the way she always did after he'd abandoned the bed, sprawled at a face-down diagonal with her right arm reaching for the mattress's edge, staking her claim. With the machine gathering in the message, on those nights when messages were left,

he'd sit, his upper body twisted, and from one room to another watch her sleeping, half naked, half covered with the bedclothes, her long wild thatch of hair the darkest shade that black could ever be spooling of its own accord across her right cheek, across the pillow, down her back in ropes and curlicues between the fanned ridges of her shoulder-blades. A beautiful woman, his wife of eighteen months, but made a stranger still by sleep. And reflecting halfway up the bed, laid out over the rumpled duvet, the rain-dappled rhomboid seep of yellow darkness, a mid-level Elysian night, their life a ladder half-scaled.

Just making it through the doors of the tower had counted as a significant social elevation; being able to meet the costs of an overpriced, over-sized shoe-box became their proud, reckless boast, and it was Valerie who'd pushed, and coaxed and then, when he'd still proven stubborn, bit him just right, in that precise, prolonged way he liked. That they'd had to settle for the tenth level, a beautiful two-bedroom apartment but still only mid-range in the pecking order, was initially enough to keep her satisfied, though the way she'd stood alongside him, a hand set against the small of his back and her eyes wide and emerald-ripe above a stylishly painted smile while watching him lean over the solicitor's desk and scrawl his name into the lease, left him with a strong sense that it might not be enough for very long, and certainly that it wouldn't be enough forever.

Occasionally, especially the weeks after they'd first moved in, and because Valerie liked to entertain, dinner party guests would be treated to the grand tour, and they'd rave in dutiful admiration at the style and substance of the place, the tasteful décor, the exquisite finish, before stepping out onto the balcony terrace to breathe this high air, gaze the length of a motorway and then crane their necks for the unfurling of the city's southern edges, a sliver of the Lee as a grey-green scuttle, old rooftops, and a sky so dazed that only the brightest half a dozen stars and planets ever got to shine. Back inside, having again taken up their wine or brandy glasses, they'd make all the right sounds then get to wondering, with casual but meticulously measured calm, about the upper floors and what possible splendours they could offer to justify their exorbitant price tag. Was it that the layouts differed from what they were seeing

around them here, or were costs dictated largely by degree of elevation? The tenth floor put the Walshes in the top division but just outside the play-off places, and while James liked to act as if he didn't care a damn about such things as status, not the way his wife did, he couldn't deny the twinge of an anger bordering on shame, not entirely for Valerie's sake, at how their guests' mouths would settle almost smugly around unsaid words and how content they were to let the silence bring its own clarity.

During those first months, though, life was fine. Marriage suited Valerie, and her beauty only deepened. She passed her mornings at the gym, or swimming, her elastic body honing itself to snap for him, and lunched and shopped away her afternoons, meeting the sort of struggling friends that she enjoyed consoling. Two evenings a week she studied intermediate Spanish in U.C.C., and always on those nights, even in bed, even after letting him peel away her clothes, she'd persist in speaking only in this second tongue, and afterwards, lying there, would practice rolling her Rs between long, heavy breaths, and lisping trick tones from the roof of her mouth. She had a little dual-language, thumb-ragged edition of Juan Ramón Jiménez's autobiographical prose poems set in Andalusia, *Platero y yo/Platero and I*, that she'd already read often enough to know nearly by heart but which she carried with her at all times and continued to reach for in every spare moment. The Spanish classes, and the practice, were to prepare for the villa they were planning on buying either that coming winter or else the following spring, when they'd have time to take a week out and just explore, to find the perfect holiday home in the perfect hillside town.

James didn't need a villa, or a trip to Spain, because his highs came from work, the South Mall office, the brokerage investments that hit and kept on hitting. No one called it the Midas Touch, but there was something golden about his gifts, his ability to foretell market swings and to multiply cash, rolling four-figure checks into the realms of a fifth digit. A month before the wedding, he'd been made a full partner, partly as a reward for the recent millions he'd earned the firm, partly because of how much credit he'd taken in helping enhance the reputation of Whelehan's as one of the country's premier stock investment brokers, but mainly

because of murmurs that other players in the game, in both Dublin and London, had noticed him and were starting to take an interest. That the promotion was a defensive move on the part of the Whelehan brothers, Thomas and Marcus, made no difference. What mattered was the exalting, and of course the positive financial implications with regard to base salary rise, stock options and an increased bonus percentage.

The business was risk/reward. Clients would come in, sit in his office and talk in safe voices, but even from across a desk he'd see the appetite in the wideness of their eyes. And they'd listen, hardly able to breathe and pleading silently to be convinced while he explained the rules of playing the market. 'If you need steady, take it to the post office. At Christmas, with the gains you make, buy yourself a Cappuccino. If you need steady, and you're of the opinion that anything much more than a cup of coffee is bad for you, then that's the road to take, because you can't lose. But neither can you expect to win if you're not prepared to play.'

Sitting across from him, leaning back in the plush leather armchair that made everyone who sat on it feel small, undersized, barely significant, they'd try to smile and look relaxed. But anxiety has its own shade.

'We're not reckless here,' he'd explain. 'Don't think that. We understand that there are real lives in the balance, and we only move when we're as sure as we can be. Of course, there are no guarantees. But there are no guarantees either when you start to cross a busy road that you'll necessarily make it to the other side. A car could break the lights, you could slip and crack your skull, a bolt of lightning could strike you dead. Any of those things could happen. But if you really want to cross that road then you weigh the odds, and you take a chance. And that's pretty much the state of play here. We do better than good at predicting stock shifts, I think our record speaks of that, but we have to be prepared for the occasional anomaly, the stock that breaks without a hint of skittishness. We have to be prepared for that, and probably forty-seven times out of fifty we *are* prepared. I'm not trying to scare you off, but it's my duty to point out the pitfalls. If I tell you we're careful, then you can take that to the bank, because it's hardly in our interest to see anyone lose their money. If you need to think it through, have your

accountant come in, take a look at the books. Our numbers stack up favourably against those of any broker anywhere. And a big part of the reason why is because, once we're sure on a stock, we like to act fast. As sure as we can be, that is, after every facet of the game has been weighed. The market is a living thing, with a heartbeat that peaks and plummets from second to second. Don't forget that, and don't underestimate it. The trick is to be able to ride the highs and bail out ahead of the troughs.'

All it took was the right bait, and a strong sharp hook. Any client who made it through the door of Whelehan's had money to splash and—as Marcus liked to put it, especially once he'd put away his third or fourth after-hours Stoli and Coke and got to really chewing ice—'the ache to make.'

The late calls started for James in early April, peaked during May and June, and lingered on, in lessening but still sporadic fashion, through much of the summer. Even into August there were nights when he'd hear the voices.

By then, the seams were already coming apart, but the law, still holding to some vague notion of the hierarchical status quo, remained as much as it could for as long as it could on his side and tried beyond all right to do its best for him by dragging its heels on hard decisions and buying him time. So it was still possible, if not quite easy, to encourage the delusion that the seas might yet settle and that all could yet be well. Even in the office, which should have been shrouded in sackcloth and soaked in blood, the mood was soft with smiling secretaries and the usual unending swagger.

He continued to meet with those clients who as the ground crumbled beneath them had begun to panic and, in the worst cases, even to crack, and his air of assurance helped assuage their dread just enough so that they nodded and let themselves be manoeuvred into a chair, took the offered drink even though they had to drive themselves either home or back to the office after finishing this conversation. The fine weighted crystal tumbler and the eighteen-year-old Glenmorangie single malt, neat or, for those of weaker will and constitution, on the rocks, ranked as a quiet display of stability and enduring quality, and most who sat there in his office did little more than take a sip or two because just having it in their hands,

feeling its weight, and knowing again its rich mineral fire in their throats, was generally enough to ensure their surrender.

Usually, he'd either remain standing or else perch on the edge of his desk, encouraging some subliminal sense of action, and he'd speak with calm, consoling disappointment, in a voice that didn't actually sound particularly worried at all, such was his confidence in being able to overcome this minor hurdle, about what had happened, about how this damned, unprecedented global devastation had put everyone under the pin. The whole world had lost money, but those who knew best knew that the important thing now was to keep strong because what had been lost could still be recovered, with just a bit of courage. Providing the ante could be upped, there was every chance of a turnaround, especially with so much stock in the mire.

'What Whelehan's are doing, and what we've already done for those few clients who were quick in getting back to the table and willing to take the kind of chances that can pay off solid to big, is to grab stock that simply can't stay down. I'm talking shares that in a normal market are so bedrock steady they don't even qualify as low risk but which in this climate have suffered the same kind of hit as everything else. I'm talking the likes of ABT, Fujifilm, Novo Nordisk, Lockheed Martin, even Apple. Stock that might be down a little now but which can't stay low, not if the world is to keep on turning. Actually, if we weren't all so shell-shocked from the crash, we'd be seeing this for what it really is: an opportunity, and a golden one. Get in with, say, a double bid, or a triple, if you can push yourself to that; hold your nerve until the shares either spike or split, and you'll be in with a far better than decent shout of recouping your initial losses.'

The things he said weren't outright lies, but they certainly skewed reality. Later, six or eight months on from the initial cracks, and during his silent moments, sitting up late into the night while Valerie slept and feeling as isolated as if he'd fallen in a well, he wondered if he'd been deluding himself, if he'd bought his own spin. He wanted to believe that some part of him had, because even if that didn't exonerate him from the carnage he'd caused it might at least have softened the moral question. But the truth was that he'd known, and there was no use in trying to pretend otherwise. He had

stood there in his office and said all the right things, and with healing hands, hallelujahs and promises of salvation, helped steer those already crippled souls out into the path of an oncoming train. That he hadn't acted alone in this, and that his words and behaviour had in fact become the default mode for brokers the world over, in no way justified or condoned his actions. Neither did excuses of addiction. Yes, there were highs from the game, and crap-shooting with the money of others, people whose faces he had to see and whose fragile stories he'd come to know by heart, brought an undeniable intensity to the table. And if the hits were exhilarating then the collapses brought their own kind of rush, a cold coppery shock just as or possibly even more intense than the highs, of a moment broken beyond repair. Once, in his teens, during a hurling match collision with the opposition's corner-forward, he'd suffered a compound fracture of his left leg. Lying there in the burnt July grass, stupid with fright and trying to breathe without screaming, he had gazed at the splintered ends of his shinbone jutting through the pap of muddy flesh, and the sensation then was the same, at least before the pain hit, that same certainty of an irreversible mistake made, with desperate consequences to follow.

Valerie wept. For weeks he had resisted confessing, in the hope that Whelehan's could still turn the ship, but then one night on towards Halloween she returned from UCC, hyper with small, indecipherable words, made directly for the computer without even so much as peeling off her coat, and began searching the net for Andalusian properties. 'I've made up my mind,' she said, without turning, when he asked how the class had gone. 'Well, nearly. I'm torn between Seville and Cadiz. But I'd like to be outside the city, ten or twenty miles. A little village, with cafes and restaurants, and where we can have a little bit of ground.'

He poured her a drink, and topped up his own glass.

'Val.'

She turned, and saw him sitting, and for the first time seemed to notice that the lights were out and the television switched off. Confusion stiffened to dread.

'Come and sit with me.'

'What is it? James, what's happened?'

When he didn't answer she came and settled beside him on

the settee, close enough so that they could communicate in whispers. The darkness felt intimidating, frightening. He put his hand on her knee, leaned in and kissed her. She let him, but didn't close her eyes. Even when he drew himself back, she could feel his breath against her cheek.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'But we can't buy the Spanish house. Not now. Not at the moment. The last thing in the world I want is to have to disappoint you, but there are problems at work. The market's crashed. You know that, everyone knows.'

'But isn't that the time to buy? I mean, if the prices are down, surely…'

'You don't get it, Val. We don't have the money. That's finished. Whelehan's is broke. Or as near as be damned. No one's saying it yet, but we're looking at bankruptcy, and most probably lawsuits. And it's not just the company, it's us, too. Everyone gets hurt by this.'

Outside, ten floors below, cars, moving with the laden determination of bees, shuttled silently away into the yellow night, heading for Douglas or the airport or Kinsale. The glass wall, and the elevated vantage gave him a sense of floating, and of disconnection. Growing up in Kilcrohane, he'd never been more than the branches of a sycamore or horse chestnut tree from the ground. The sea then was always in sight, his hands always within reach of dirt, and the walls of his grandfather's cottage were of old thick stone, chunks of mountainside.

'Look,' he said, wiping away tears from her cheek with the pad of his thumb. 'There's a chance that this will all blow over. And I'm not saying no to Spain. It's just that it can't happen at the moment. Let's see where we are in six months or a year. Okay?'

She looked up at him then and tried to smile, and he saw in her face what he'd been seeing for weeks, even months, in the faces of the men and occasionally women who came into his office: a desperation to be convinced and a need to believe. And it was because of this that he held back the rest of what he'd planned to tell her, refraining from putting a figure on what they'd already lost and what they were about to, as well as the likelihood, fast increasing towards certainty, that they'd lose the apartment.

And then there was a morning, a Friday, the second-last before Christmas, when, sitting in his now otherwise-unmanned office with a phone that had lost the habit of ringing and a mug of instant coffee, his last stand against the winter's rawness, he opened the morning paper to the news story of a man, not yet named officially, a separated father of two children, a boy and a girl, who shortly before nine o'clock the previous night had, according to witnesses, reversed his car and family into the river. During the past year, the man, a self-employed builder, had suffered a series of bad investments, culminating in forced bankruptcy and the loss of his family home.

With the solstice so close, and the sky moiling with the grey bilge of sleet to come, the morning settled for a half-light. From Whelehan's front door, James could see across the South Mall and down the side street opposite to where Oliver Plunkett Street, and still beyond, Patrick's Street, had their Christmas lights already burning. For weeks now, the radio had been keeping a count of how many shopping days remained, and the icy breeze, heavy with traffic voice, carried inside it a hum of something seasonal, *Silver Bells*, *Silent Night*. He pulled the door shut behind him, folded *The Examiner* under his arm, buttoned his overcoat up to his throat and walked home, forgetting that he'd driven to work this morning, forgetting almost everything other than what lay ahead.

Ten minutes later, he was in the lobby of the Elysian. Escaping the wind was a relief. The walk had caused him to sweat, and his eyes watered, causing his vision to explode at the least stab of direct light. A large tree had been set up and decorated just inside the double doors, a bloom of small colours that shifted in time to some preset pattern.

He tried not to think, but as the lift made its slow climb up through the tower, he kept seeing Michael O'Neill the afternoon that Marcus Whelehan had made the introductions, how the man had settled in the leather armchair, not in a suit but in jeans and an old blue shirt with the sleeves rolled up, how he'd crossed his legs and talked about how he wasn't looking to be the next Trump or Rockefeller, but if he could make enough to set up a bit of a nest-egg for the kids, enough to educate them, give them a decent chance at something, he'd be happy. It sounded simple, the way he said it,

simple enough to believe.

They were broke, too. That's what Valerie needed to know. The lease was covered until March, but the solicitors had warned him to expect a court date for early in the New Year, and to expect annihilation. There was nearly twenty grand in an account in her name, which they'd probably get to keep, but the rest, everything else, was up for grabs.

Lately, he'd been having trouble breathing. His chest felt constantly clenched. Stress, he supposed, because he was surely too young still for a heart attack, though that'd be one way out – and, for insurance reasons, the best way. A few weeks after getting married, he'd taken out a large premium so that, in the event of an accident or tragedy, Valerie would be looked after. And as the lift's door slid open onto his floor, he wondered whether Michael O'Neill had insurance, and whether any company would still pay out under such circumstances.

For the better part of a week, Valerie had been at him to decorate the place. They had a tree, but she wanted lights on the balcony, too. 'When it comes to Christmas,' she'd said, 'gaudy is good.' Now, the apartment was still and silent. On the bread board, an apple had been sliced up and only partially eaten. The remnants had begun to turn brown, but apart from that, everything was in place, every surface gleaming. Suddenly overcome, he leaned with one hand against the wall and gazed out over Infirmary Road and across the rooftops of Copley Street and the South Terrace. Beyond the glass, everything looked grey, and darkening, and yet for the first time in weeks, maybe in years, his mind felt clear.

He took off his coat, threw himself down on the settee and sighed heavily. It was a beautiful apartment, but worth nowhere near its asking price. The cottage in Kilcrohane, old and crumbling as it might have been, rat-infested during the winter months and always full of cold and the sweet smells of mutton stew and turf smoke, still had more about it, more character, more life. The Elysian, his corner of it anyway, felt more like a museum than a home. Pristine, sterile, intimidating. He thought of Valerie on her own here and, without even realising, began to cry. Once the tears came, it didn't seem as if they'd ever stop. A bank had burst. He cradled his face into his cupped palms and wept until his throat was raw and he

could no longer swallow without wincing. Then he went through into the kitchen, splashed his face with warm water from the sink, and tried to steady himself. Because there could be no note, she'd never fully know, though she'd guess, especially once someone made the connection with what had happened on Horgan's Wharf, and she'd hate him for it, probably forever, not for the part he'd played in that tragedy but for this, taking this way out. He pictured her in his mind and felt the tears come again, and he'd have given anything at that moment to call her, to interrupt her lunch or her shopping just to hear her voice one more time, even for a few seconds, and to be able to tell her how much he loved her and that she should never entertain a second's worth of doubt about that. Two things she'd never needed telling and had probably always taken for granted, until now. But it would suit her, in a way, to hate him, and to resist the notion that he'd done this as much for her sake as his own. That way, she could get on with life.

When he was able, he stepped out onto the terrace. The guard rail came to chest-height, but he raised his hand above the parapet and felt the gusting of a violent wind. If he used the step ladder, if he made sure to prepare the strings of lights and to partially hang them, the fall would have to at least suggest the possibility of an accident. Let them investigate and ask their questions. Doubt was a long way from proof.

He had an urge to lean over the rail and look down, but held himself back. There was no need for that assurance. Ten floors would be enough, more than enough. He drew and spent another long, deep, unsteady breath, then went inside to fetch the ladder and the lights.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Coaga Fís / Fifty Visions

Colm Ó Ceallacháin

1. Tionscnamh fíorghalánta.

A very stylish affair.

2. Slios de thriantán dronuilleach. Taobhagán² = Elysian² + Sráid Eglinton²

The side of a right-angled triangle. Hypotenuse² = Elysian² + Eglinton Street ²

3. 3.00 ó Taunton. Elysian (50/1), thit ag an dtríú cliath.

3.00 from Taunton, Novices Hurdle. Elysian (50/1), fell at the third.

4. Anagram. 'Leath Y? Sin é!' 'Ailse the N.Y?' 'Tí shean-Ely?'

An Anagram. 'Say, then lie?' 'Ye sat in Hel?' 'An eely shit?'

5. Aisling ghéar.

A figment of your imagination.

6. Ar Urlár a hAon, siopa Lidl.

On Floor One, a Lidl store.

7. Ionad cuairteoirí, ag comóradh Éirí Amach 1916 i gCorcaigh.

A visitor centre, commemorating the 1916 Rising in Cork city.

8. Deoch. Toise amháin suimint fhliuch, toise amháin Windowlene, toise amháin Dutch Gold.

A cocktail. One measure wet cement, one measure Windowlene,

one measure Dutch Gold. Enjoy Elysian responsibly.

9. Ainm ceana, a bhuíochas ar shiopa an bhunurláir. 'Al-tí uí Fhloinn?'

A bad pun on the name of a local hostelry. 'Gold eggs?' 'The sexed-up tent?'

10. Clog gréine, a chrann cumarsáide ag gobadh tríd an gceo draíochta, ag caitheamh scátha i dtreo na habhann le lá nua a fhógairt.

As I stumble home, I spy its mast through the fog, backlit by the sun. It sends a faint shadow across the river to me, a first tendril of the new day. A sundial.

11. Breac-Ghaeltacht, is mé ag siúl an dorais isteach ar thóir leithris.

Crossing the bridge I walk in the front door and, speaking in Irish, ask to use the toilet. A Gaeltacht.

12. Gaeltacht faoi bhagairt, is mé á dhíbirt ag an gconcierge.

I am promptly ejected by the concierge. A Gaeltacht in decline.

13. Ionad Barr Feabhais.

A Centre of Excellence.

14. Tearmann asal.

A donkey sanctuary.

15. Ar Urlár a Dó, tragóid. I gcistin árasáin, agus é ag ullmhú an dinnéir, breacan fear inscríbhinn i leabhar filíochta. 'Do Claire, mar cheiliúradh ar ár gcéad choinne!' Sa seomra leapa, pacálann sí mála.

On Floor Two, as a man prepares dinner in their apartment, he writes a

dedication in the flyleaf of a book of poetry. 'To Claire, on the anniversary of our first meeting!' In the bedroom, she packs a suitcase. A tragedy.

16. Sadhlann arbhair.

A grain silo.

17. Le ballaí agus fuinneoga King Kong-dhíonach.

With guaranteed King Kong-resistant walls and windows.

18. anuas. Dar leis an nGréagach ársa, tá Tír na nÓg ar bharr an tí i gCorcaigh (7 litir).

down. A blessed field of dreams, a stylish affair (7 letters).

19. Ceann scríbe Slí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin.

A waymarked trail on The Wild Atlantic Way.

20. Ár sciath chosanta, ocht n-urlár déag in airde.

A thumbs-up, eighteen floors high, assuring us that everything will be fine.

21. Ár méar láir, sínte i dtreo na bhflaithis is ag fógairt fáin ar gach focaire againn.

A fat middle finger, extended skywards. 'Am I blocking your view? Get used to it, motherfucker.'

22. Loisceoir.

An incinerator.

23. Scoil.

A School.

24. Leabharlann.

A library.

25. Teach céaduaire nó deis infheistíochta.

An ideal starter home or investment opportunity.

26. Ar Urlár a Trí, taispeántas ealaíona. Tar éis dó ballaí an árasáin a chlúdach i gcáipéisí a ghoid sé ó árasáin eile (comhaontaithe tionóntachta agus treoracha i gcás éigeandála ina measc), seasann fear siar is amharcann ar a shaothar.

On Floor Three a man, having completely covered the walls of his apartment in documents pilfered from other empty apartments (tenancy agreements, records of cleaning, directions in case of fire), stands back and admires his work. An art exhibition.

27. Cúrsa 'crazy golf' ocht bpoll déag.

An eighteen hole crazy golf course.

28. Ábhar scéal grinn. 'Conas is féidir céad tuaisceartach a fháisceadh isteach san Elysian? Abair leo faoi "Specialbuys" na Déardaoine in Aldi.'

The subject of a northside joke. 'How do you fit 100 norries into the Elysian? Tell them about the Thursday Specialbuys in Aldi.'

29. Ábhar scéal grinn eile. 'Tuige na fuinneoga bioracha ar an Elysian? Chun deisceartaigh a threorú chuig an oifig "intreo" nua.'

The subject of a southside joke. 'Why have the Elysian apartments got pointy windows? To direct southsiders to their new dole office.'

30. Do chara Facebook. Éilís Uí Fhinn is ainm dom ar líne.

Your Facebook friend. My online name is Ellie S.

31. Leaba i measc na naomh.

A dwelling among the stars.

32. Teach siúil. Tar éis teacht i dtír ag Cé Albert, buaileann taibhse na Banríona Victoria lena mac Éadbhard, é féin tagtha ar cuairt leathchéad éigin bliain níos déanaí. Fad is a fhéachann siad le hiontas ar a chéile deifríonn triúr páistí tharstu, tríocha bliain eile chun cinn. Isteach leo go Stáisiún Sráid Eglinton, leis an traein a thógaint go Tigh Molaige.

A haunted apartment block. The ghost of Queen Victoria, having disembarked at Albert Quay in 1849, bumps into her son Edward VII, as he steps ashore fifty years later. As they stare at each other across the aisles of Aldi, three children cast a cursory glance in their direction. It is 1932, and they hurry past into Eglinton Street Station to take the train to Timoleague.

33. Teach gloine do bhláthfhleasca sochraide.

A growhouse for funeral wreaths.

34. Teach oráistí.

An orangery.

35. Ar Urlár a Ceathair, dráma feistis. Leagann bean trí chulaith ar a leaba – gúna prionta, mionsciorta agus jeggings. Ag amharc ó cheann go ceann, roghnaíonn sí faoi dheireadh na jeggings.

On Floor Four a woman lays three outfits on a bed – a print dress, a miniskirt and jeggings. After some deliberation, she chooses the jeggings. A costume drama.

36. Spolchasán.

A phosyx.

37. Scéal eile.

A likely story.

38. Haiku.

Leiviatan, ag lobhadh
ar chladach na Laoi –
cruimh-fhéasta.

A haiku.

Through morning mist a
galleon spied – crystal prowed
becalmed.

39. Foirgneamh urraithe. 'The PricewaterhouseCoopers Elysian?' 'The Barry's Tea Elysian?' 'The Hillbilly's Fried Chicken Elysian?'

A sponsored building. 'The Citibank Elysian?' 'The Carphone Warehouse Elysian?' 'The Ballymaloe Country Relish Elysian?'

40. Ábhar scéal 'cnag cnag' a theip. 'Cnag cnag...Cnag cnag... An bhfuil éinne sa bhaile?'

The subject of a failed 'knock knock' joke. 'Knock knock...Knock knock...Is anybody home?'

41. Seomra taispeántais troscán.

A furniture showroom.

42. "Elysian?" "Cá bhfuil Jean?" "Mo leithscéal?" "Jean, a deirim. Abair léi teacht trasna láithreach, go bhfuil ticéad anseo di d'eitilt na maidine go Marrakech." "A dhuine uasail, is í seo oifig fáilte an Elysian." "An ea? Tá fíorbhrón orm, táim sa scéal mícheart, mar sin."

"Good morning, the Elysian. How can I help you?" "Get Jean on the phone now!" "Excuse me?" "Don't play dumb with me. Tell her to come to my

place, collect the package, and be on a flight to Marrakech in one hour." "Sir, this is the Elysian. An apartment building." "It is? Sorry, wrong story."

43. Foláireamh daoibh go léir.

A warning to you all.

44. Ar Urlár a Cúig, briatharchath. Osclaíonn fear fuinneog agus suíonn ar an leac. Thíos faoi, cloistear scairteanna. "Cad 'tá cearr?" "Bhfuil faitíos ort?" "Léim, a leibide!" Seasann sé, miongháire ar a aghaidh.

On Floor Five a man opens a window and sits out on the ledge. As a crowd gathers on the pavement below, a shout is heard. "What are you waiting for, ya pussy? Jump!" Smiling, he stands up. A cliffhanger.

45. Prochóg an fhranc-fhiréid.

The lair of the ratferret.

46. Imbhuailteoir Mór Hadróin don anam.

A Large Hadron Collider for the soul.

47. Aon rud is mian leat.

Anything you want it to be.

48. An t-ionad ina bhuailfidh tú le grá do chroí.

The very spot where you will meet your future love.

49. Cnuasach dánta is scéalta.

A volume of poems and stories.

50. Clabhsúr grod ar thionscnamh galánta.

An abrupt end to a stylish affair.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

For Pointing at the Sun

Paul Casey

1.

Just as the pillars meet a mile above the architrave
A sky splinter plummets to puncture the floodplain

A standing stone of city glass acute enough to scrape
the skyline, raze the tideline, wield a fist of cumulous

A capstone of progress is washed clean by the sun
A stylite-engineer tests the lean of the cornerstone

As gravity, reversed in the top percentile sends
rich minds skyward, just clouds for parachutes

The man with the paraglider has built a ramp
at the very top above his penthouse eyrie, early

everyday spirals down around a thousand windows
a thousand silent lightboxes empty as lives en suite

There's sand from the rock of Barra in the concrete
from Ballingeary, Inniscarra, Atlantic in the glass

2.

River waters laugh into history's estuary
where floods ever migrate, recede to accede

The tower's north side is half-lost in cloud reflection
The sun burns a portal through the plexus of its illusion

Passing by traffic lights bus windows airbrush passengers'
faces with fresh graffiti, stone walls, posters, pedestrians

In a main street mirror, a blur catches its owner off guard
He sees the speed but not the face of his puzzled likeness

The stock room of the medi-clinic is filled with plastic
cards, booze-rattle, metal quakes from the ALDI aisles

From further back in the queue, the teller's eyes are colourless
At the till, only a hint of copper glints from the vanished blue

At the window end of the bar the afternoon runs like a film into the
pint glass
How intimate the world turns through the distance of surfaces, how
oblivious

3.

New lives shimmer up and down the soundproof aquarium
Imagine immortal interiors, the small releases from gravity

Street shoulders prefer the give of lime, of sandstone, the weights
of newspaper and lateral symmetries, urbanities, familiar rhythms

A splinter of sky has pierced the riverbed, recalibrated
the azimuth, realigned migrant magnetites and micro-

climates for swallows to clear, with token sundial shadows
arcing slowly over fates and *fulacht-fiadh* inspired jacuzzis

Designer stone circles distinct as sunken sculptures in Cancun
Reefs reset for Tartarus in nine short days, an artificial equinox

Corals of consequence, stark and lifeless in the seething seas
Artefacts of glass and stone whose only sculptor is silence

From the crest of Patrick's bridge, the Lee stirs life into city lights
A moon frogleaps across a seal's back into the neon subconscious

Everything's New, Everything's Been Done

Joseph Horgan

thanks to the unenlightened policy of the Elysian bureaucracy
in imposing such unreasonable conditions of access.
—J. J. Lee

All of those places where it never
rains,
the sun is always shining
and
you purchase some of the sky,
becoming
the owner of a modern
cathedral.

It'll never fly
and if it does
we'll never be in it.

One hundred golden rooms
empty,
straining
to be somewhere else,
above,
outside,
so much glass for looking
up.

Spaceship,
space cadet,
spacer.

Still here,
pivoting on affection for corners,
specific,
looking up at could-be-anywhere,

a grand
fiction in constructed space,
avoiding,
any love of place.

Say a prayer and bring
your bag I'll get us a bed
for the night.

Better a crooked thing,
for reflection,
like a planet if you get
too close
you can't make it out and so
get to see
what it's really
like.

Cold wind,
so much weather,
no matter what.

Terminus

Danielle McLaughlin

Terminus: Part I

'Strangers complain of the humidity of our atmosphere, which would seem to be perpetually overcharged with water, for rain descends here on an average, as has been computed, 224 days out of the 365, sometimes causing floods, which produce disastrous consequences.'

from Henry and Coghlan's General Directory of Cork, 1867

Marsh

The boy lies on his stomach in the tall grass of the marsh. It is late June, the weather unusually hot, and the sleeves of his shirt are rolled up, spiky bulrushes needling his arms. Duckweed floats on the surface of a bog-pool, dangling golden-white roots into the water. The boy peers over the heads of yellow flag irises, across the reeds, out to the estuary where a breeze puckers the water. He is eleven years old, small, wiry, pale skinned. It is 1750 and across the sea in Gloucester a man named Rudhall is casting Shandon Bells, but the boy doesn't know this and if he did, he wouldn't care. That morning, going door-to-door selling vegetables, he knocked over a jug on the steps of one of the big houses. He doesn't remember the jug being there when he went up the steps; he only became aware of it on his way down, when his foot struck it and it shattered. 'Gom!' his mother shouted, when a maid arrived to say that the jug would have to be paid for.

'I'll stow away,' he'd cried, 'I'll get a boat to Liverpool,' because he'd heard older boys talk like that.

'Off with you then,' his mother said.

The silence of the marsh is punctured by gunshot. A bird drops from the sky, plops into the reeds. The boy cleaves close to the ground, listens for the sound of a hunter coming to bag the spoils, but minutes pass and no one appears. The bird has hit the ground at an odd angle, one wing raised like the sail of a ship. A scatter of feathers float to earth in its wake, a few so light and

downy that they are only now touching down, ghost feathers settling on the leaves of plants that have broken their fall.

The boy crawls forward on his stomach, until he reaches the bird. It is a red grouse. He lifts it, marvelling at its soft roundness, its rust-coloured beauty, its woody, bark-like legs. One startled eye stares up at him, reproachfully, and he wants to put the bird back down, as if by picking it up he has become complicit in its death. His mother, though, could pluck and stew it, make broth from the bones; it would be a peace offering. The grouse is warm and when he strokes a finger along the length of its back he half expects it to flutter against him. He thinks of the carcass boiling long hours in the pot until the bones are soft and grey and splinter in his hands.

There is a rustling behind him in the reeds. He turns to see a man in tweeds approaching, puffing and shouting, a rifle over his shoulder. 'Thief' the man roars. Instinctively, the boy runs. The soft ground of the marsh sucks at his feet, pulling him in. He only realises he is still carrying the bird when the man calls for him to drop it. 'Blackguard,' the man shouts, pausing to discharge a musket-load of pellets. The boy releases his hold on the grouse and it falls to earth for the second time that day. The hunter doesn't stop to retrieve it. He is gaining on the boy, closing the gap between them in long squelching strides, and now he has the boy by the shirt collar. He strikes him across the head with the butt of his rifle. A crack rings out across the marsh, like the slap of wings on air when swans take flight, like a jug rolling down the steps of a house in early morning, breaking.

Asylum

Ships come up the channel with spices, salt, cloth, wine, and go out with barrels of yellow butter. Some spill a cargo of grain onto the quay and depart again on the next tide. Others dock for days or weeks, perhaps a whole winter. The years turn. With detached curiosity, the boy watches his shirt decompose, sees its fabric come apart, threads mingling with smaller stalks of grass. He notices how the threads look like tendrils of duckweed root, browning as they rot. The small, tidy creatures of the marsh pick clean his bones,

leave the marks of tiny teeth on femur and tibia; mud fills the cast of his cracked skull. The bones sink deeper and deeper into the marsh, anchoring him to this place. He hears the rustle of stems, the shaking loose of seeds from pods, the fog horn of a ship out on the estuary. He curls to sleep in the same patch of earth, sometimes for hours, sometimes years. A short distance away, on drier ground at Blackrock Road is a red brick building called the Asylum. Here are people who, like him, were once of the world, but now are not. He visits sometimes to talk to a woman who tears repeatedly at her clothes, and lists in long guttural strings the Latin names of flowers and birds, lists them in a rising and falling sing-song voice until a warder comes to bang on the door, tells her to hold her tongue.

Terminus

Inch by grudging inch, the marsh is won from the water. And though it appears that the water has yielded, every so often it changes its mind, charges in to take back what it once owned. Across the city, the boy sees a gold fish upon a weathervane. It, like him, is a thing suspended. He wonders how the fish got there, imagines it impaled during some long ago flood. One morning the boy wakes to noise: crashing, dragging, shouting. There are men with shovels; horses towing cartloads of wooden sleepers and lengths of iron track. Every strike of the pick axe summons from the ground others like him: a girl of twelve or thirteen, her belly round with child, her throat cut; a young man, his hands tied behind his back; a fox cub. The men leave and trains arrive. Like the ships, the trains come and go—Bandon, Kinsale, Passage West, the Turkish Baths at Glenbrook—and the boy rides in the carriages, swaps the low whispering of reeds for the querulous chatter of passengers.

Sorting Office

The years turn. The trains stop running and a building goes up, a sorting office for mail. From cloth sacks, letters spill like shoals of fish onto long tables. They have come from one place, are on their way to another, and while they are under this roof, they are neither

here nor there. The boy hovers by the tables, rides in the post office vans, sticks a finger in the franking machines. One morning he wakes to find the air heavy with dust, a dust thick as the fogs that enveloped the old marsh. Amid the rubble, he spies a bag of letters left behind. When next it rains, the letters dissolve, page by page, word by word. Terminus. The boy sighs, settles down to wait. He has discerned that there is an order to things: a bird takes flight, a bird is felled; things rise and things fall; there is noise and, after the noise, quiet.

Elysian

Men return, as the boy knew they would. This time they build a tower higher than anything he has seen before, higher than the mast of the tallest ship that has travelled up the estuary; a tower with a mast of its own that resembles the thin, delicate antenna of a field grasshopper. On its spike above the city, the Goldie Fish shifts, whether in anger or deference, the boy cannot tell. He knows only that he saw a fluttering of gills. The boy waits for things to start coming, start going, but all is quiet. Like a moth, he is drawn each night to the lights that shine out over the water, a strange luminescence like the will o the wisps that once flickered above the marshes. He rides the lifts, knocks on doors, follows from floor to floor and room to room a woman who, like him, is never at rest. He ponders the strangeness of his almost-forgotten bones. Lately the soil that holds them has grown wetter and looser. Soundlessly, furtively, the water has returned, jealous as a cuckolded lover, angry. The boy wonders what it means. And all the time the Fish gazes down from its steeple, mouth clamped tight on a bellyful of secrets; as if it has made some great leap over space and time and waits for the city to catch up.

Terminus: Part II

From the balcony of Apartment 814 - in summer at least, I have yet to winter in this place—there's a moment, usually around 6am, when the sun strikes the east-facing walls of the grain silos along the quay. It edges slowly to the top of the R & H Hall building and falls

in a soft pink wash onto the river, the bridges, the brave new glass of the building once called the Athenaeum that is now the Opera House. It's chilly at this hour, even in summer, and I pull my robe tighter around me, a plum-coloured robe in faded silk that someone left behind. Already, there are ships coming up the estuary. I watch one dock, an enormous grey and white hulk of a thing. A gang plank is set down, though I presume it's not called that—*gangplank*—a word straight from the pirate books of my childhood. Whatever it is called, it is broad and inviting. It would be easy, I think, to sneak up when no one's looking and stow away. But listen to me: *stowaway*. That is another of those words: Victorian, nostalgic, out-of-time; mementos of a past that these days keeps me on an ever shorter leash.

Mist rises in puffs from the railway tracks that lead to Queenstown, as if a gun has just been discharged and the air has not quite cleared. Even though it's plainly mist, and not smoke, still I sniff, half expecting to catch a whiff of gunpowder. And yes, I know that it's Cobh, not Queenstown, hasn't been Queenstown for a hundred years or more, but I've decided that I like the sound of Queenstown better. Living alone has inclined me to please myself, which, it turns out, is just as fruitless a task as attempting to please anybody else. On the mornings that I rise late, I go instead to the south side of the Tower, taking my master key and a mug of coffee with me. From Apartment 1618 it is possible to see all the way to Fivemilebridge, to see the planes taking off from the airport, and the lines of cars coming in along the South Link.

*

Last Tuesday morning I had a visit from Gareth, the landlord's agent and general checker-upper. Gareth is 30 or thereabouts, louche, lazy, vaguely unkempt, one of those men whose every intimation hints that he has just had sex and that if one plays one's cards right, he is quite open to having it again. I've encountered many men like Gareth in my life, great shoals of them when I was younger, when my bait was fresher. Their incidence lessened as I got older, has petered out almost entirely now that I'm in my forties. Still, even though I'm out of practice, I find that I can manage

Gareth well enough. If when he arrives I'm in apartment 615, where I keep my kitchen supplies, I'll make a pot of tea. If I'm in one of the other apartments, there will be no tea and I'll proceed directly to the list of things noted since his last visit: I might tell him, for instance, that the railing above the bath in apartment 1204 is coming loose, or that the carpet is lifting at the edges outside the lifts on floor 9. When the Co-operative still existed, this cataloguing of defects was my main chore; I'd been found wanting, quite early on, in things like cross-stitch and appliqué. Even though the others have all gone, I continue to prepare the lists and Gareth continues to accept them. He writes everything down in a notebook that he keeps in his back pocket, though rarely is anything fixed. It's a harmless little charade that allows both of us feign usefulness.

I was in 615 last Tuesday and so I made tea, but he swallowed it down in three quick gulps. Before I'd a chance to produce my list, he got up and went to stand by the window. I followed his gaze upriver to where small pleasure craft bobbed up and down and struck their fibreglass hulls against the board walk outside the Clarion. 'We've had complaints again,' he said.

When I said that I was alone here, that was not entirely true. Also living in the tower is the person I call Old Dear. I used to get into trouble for calling her that. 'She's a *woman'*, our Project Leader, Judith, would say, 'we are all of us *women;* not girls, not sweethearts, not whores, not dears, but *women*.' Judith also had a problem with my use of the word cunt, had called me out on it once or twice in committee meetings. That, of course, was when Judith was still here, and the Project, in its original incarnation, was in full swing. People would bring us things, this was how Judith had envisaged it, and we would unravel them: jumpers, shirts, tea cosies; we would rip, unpick, take apart, unglue. Having returned everything to its initial state, we would hang our newly-raw materials from the outside of the building like animal pelts left to dry before curing. And then we would make of it all something magnificent, the precise nature of the magnificence to be decided by Committee.

'What's she saying this time?' I asked.

'She thinks you and her would get along better if you stopped visiting the 5th Floor.'

'I think we'd get along better if she stopped breathing,' I

said. 'And how can I do my list, or the Project, without going to 5th?'

'She says you've been in the apartment beside hers. Making noise. Chanting.'

'You do know it's all in her mind?' I said.

Gareth shrugged, said nothing. Possibly he had me down for the sort that might be partial to a bit of chanting.

'Listen,' I said, 'There's a few cards missing from that deck, if you know what I mean?'

He stared at me blankly. 'Not the full shilling,' I said, 'Looney, cracked. They get like that, old people.' With the others gone, I could say anything I liked. *Old dear, old dear, old dear,* I recited in my head. *Now, Judith*, *what have you got to say about that? You cunt.*

Gareth, I noticed, was writing everything down. With sudden clarity, I saw it all being read back to me at some point in the future in a less scenic setting, a Garda station, say, or a courthouse. Because Old Dear was somebody's mother. I don't mean that as a call to empathy; what I mean is, she's the mother of somebody important, maybe even the landlord's mother. 'I'll give you something for your notebook,' I said. 'She was here last night, trying to kick my door in. Write that down, why don't you.'

The evening before, I'd gone to bed early in Apartment 210, bed being the sleeping bag that moves around the building with me. I was woken shortly after midnight by kicks so pitiful in their lack of force that if I wasn't such a light sleeper they mightn't have woken me at all. I imagined Old Dear's spindly legs splintering as they connected with the timber. Swearing, I wriggled out of my sleeping bag. The city at night is an eerie and majestic place, that pooling of moon and neon and streetlamps on the river, a trembling symphony of light that, if one didn't know better, could just as easily be coming from below as above, and the Tower, too, sending its own red and green rays out over the water. They cost me precious time, those lights, and when I reached the door she'd already gone. I looked left and right along the corridor but there was only a feather resting lightly on the carpet, quivering with the memory of recent flight. Had she placed it there or merely dropped it? It was beautiful, long and a brownish-red colour. If I could've been certain that Old Dear wasn't using it for shamanic purposes, I might have

worn it in my hair. Instead, I displayed it in a jug in Apartment 412, the way one might display a flower.

Gareth didn't write any of this down. As he closed the notebook and put it away, his once-lascivious eyes met mine and the only thing they intimated was disappointment. He'd gone before it occurred to me that I hadn't given him the list. And he didn't ask about the Project.

In the first few weeks after the others left, my energy was evenly divided between working on the Project, and persuading Gareth that I was, in fact, working on the Project. 'But where is it?' he asked one day, genuinely bewildered, looking about him as if it were a thing that could be displayed above a fireplace, or in the space between the sink and the fridge. I was tired that evening, too tired to defend Art to Gareth, or even to myself. 'You're looking at it,' I said, mostly out of exasperation, 'I am the Project.' No sooner had I said it than it struck me that it was true, or if not true exactly, that at least it had potential. *I am the Project*. The idea took hold, excited me to such an extent that in the nights that followed I could barely sleep. I walked the building, going barefoot up and down stairs, unlocking doors with the key I'd inherited from Judith. By night I trailed my presence over corridors and floors and walls. I pressed my hands against the glass doors of balconies and looked out upon the sleeping city. I am the Project.

After Gareth left, I cleared away the tea things, rinsed the two mugs and put them back on their shelf. I waited until noon and then I did what I do every day at precisely that hour: I took off all my clothes and stepped out onto the balcony. There's a scar on my left arm, just above my wrist, a white furrowed rut in my skin where I cut it slicing sweet potatoes in a restaurant in Oregon twenty years ago. When bared to cold, the lines of the ruts grow deeper. They pucker, as if, on the inside, a little creature is pulling the ghost threads of long gone stitches. The skin on my elbows is hard and calloused, my legs are inked with spider veins, the hair in my crotch, in my armpits, is coarse and unruly. I offer myself up, a sacrificial thing, an atonement. My back a straight rod on which is impaled my un-severed head, a warning to those who would enter this Tower, this city. A Jesus or a Barabbas, I cannot say; I know only that I am the Project. On the balcony that day, I noticed for the first time how

the bloody fish speared atop Shandon Steeple, my arch nemesis, my challenger, was eyeing me disparagingly. Heartless creature, I thought, even at my coldest, I am warmer than you.

And then there came the sound of someone clapping. Not from the pavement below, where occasionally people gather to watch, but from somewhere nearer. Even though I'd never known Old Dear to sit out on her balcony, when I angled my head, there she was, settled in a deck chair. There was something about the pace of the clapping that bothered me: it was slow, too slow; mockingly slow, in fact. Was it possible that this slowness was somehow age-related? That arthritis, say, or some other medical condition, had so enfeebled her hands that this was the most vigorous show of appreciation she could manage? Because she looked to all intents and purposes as an old lady should: some manner of cardigan, a floral-print dress, a head of silver curls. She held my gaze for a moment, then stopped clapping and got up and went inside, sliding shut her balcony door with a remarkable degree of force.

*

The night of Gareth's visit, that Tuesday of accusations and ambiguous hand-clapping, I heard kicking again. I was faster to the door this time, but not fast enough. Again the corridor was empty. That's it, I thought, and I shoved my feet into my shoes and ran down the stairs in my pyjamas, banged on her door. When there was no reply, I banged harder. 'I'm not going to hurt you,' I said, 'I just want to talk to you.' I listened for the sound of her moving around inside, but everything was quiet. Taking the master key from the cord around my neck, I let myself in.

What exactly had I expected? Moth balls perhaps, that pungent camphorous odour I remembered from my grandmother's wardrobe. Lace doilies, lemon soap, romance novels with lurid pink covers. And tidy, I had expected tidy, as if all women on reaching a certain age were seized by a sudden yearning for domestic propriety. Coats and scarves and umbrellas were hung one on top of another on an array of hooks; there was an oriental-style plant holder that Old Dear had clearly been using as an ashtray, cigarette butts scattered around the brittle remains of what might once have been a

rosemary plant. In the living room, the journal of an environmental organisation was on a coffee table, bleak graphs illustrating an article about climate change. But it was the jars that caught my attention, glass jars of the kind for holding jams or pickles, lined up in rows that stretched the full length of the apartment, hundreds and hundreds of them, lid-less, all of them filled with water. I crouched beside the one nearest me and saw a tiny moth floating motionless on the surface, and all around the rim a fur of green algae.

'How did you get in?' She materialised, not from the bedroom, but behind me, from the corridor, startling me. I straightened up quickly, careful not to knock over any jars. She had on a pink bed-jacket over a long tweed skirt, and a pair of grey slippers. 'I was passing,' I said, aware that this was not altogether credible, given the hour. 'I saw your door open and thought I'd check on you.'

She snorted. 'I know you have a key,' she said. 'Don't think I haven't seen you traipsing around the building at all hours.'

'You're one to talk,' I said.

'Excuse me?'

'Miss Voodoo Feathers herself.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'You need help,' I said.

'This,' Old Dear said, 'from the woman who cavorts naked on the balconies.'

'If you paid attention,' I said, 'you would know that I remain completely still for the duration of my performance.'

'*Performance*,' she said, and she tittered. I knew then that there was nothing whatsoever wrong with her hands. Before I could retaliate she said: 'You're sleeping with him, aren't you? That young jobsworth who comes round once in a while. You're sleeping with him, that's how you've got a key.'

It pleased me, actually, to think that she suspected me of it. Even allowing that we were talking about Gareth, it was, all the same, weirdly gratifying. 'I don't think that's any of your business,' I said.

While we were talking, Old Dear—and the name seemed all wrong now, but it was impossible to think of her as anything else—had removed her slippers, and used the end of her skirt to wipe mud spatters from her bare feet. That done, she navigated a delicate

route through the jars to a tall cupboard in the corner. She took out a pair of waders. 'I'm going outside,' she said, 'city's flooding.' I looked toward the glass doors of the balcony. Beyond the glow of the street lamps the sky was lightening from indigo to violet, but a rain that had started after I'd gone to bed was still falling, heavier now, colliding against the glass in great gusting sheets. Old Dear opened a different cupboard and took out a clear plastic bag containing a dozen or so empty glass jars. She took two overcoats from their hooks. 'You can come with me, if you like,' she said.

*

It rains here more than in any other place in this damned country; I heard that once on a radio show, though the precise statistics elude me. This past week, there hasn't been a single day without rain. In the living room in Apartment 814 I have placed a porcelain jug and a glass jar in the centre of the floor. It is the jug from 412 that I used to keep the feather in, but I have removed the feather and have filled the jug with dried peas. They're the hard, shrivelled sort of pea that must be soaked before use, which means that I'm unlikely ever to eat them. Each time it rains, I transfer a pea from jug to jar. If it is a particularly heavy shower, I may transfer two peas. I have intuited that when the transfer of peas is complete, something will happen. Some big, apocalyptic thing will be done by me, or perhaps to me; my intuition, I've noticed, often fails me on specifics. And so, when the first drops of the day spatter the glass, I kneel before my jug that is like an egg timer, only different, and measure out peas like fat, green grains of sand.

I walked the city with Old Dear that night and watched water bubble up through fissures in the streets. Anglesea Street, South Mall, Father Mathew Street: Old Dear knelt and collected samples from the gullies, and then we hurried across the river to Popes Quay, MacCurtain Street, Railway Street, to fill more jars. There were patterns to be observed, she told me, patterns in the way the rain fell and settled, the way it grew fatter in the jars that sat in rows on her apartment floor, the way it absorbed light and images and the organic matter of the insects that drowned in it. In a few more weeks she would have enough jars and there would be an

answer, though an answer to what she didn't say. The river was still rising as we made our way back, and I felt the streets pulse beneath my feet, the low, insistent thrum of water against concrete. Old Dear took one final sample from the ornamental pond in the Tower's internal courtyard. In the dark, the pond was almost opaque, its water thick and black and peaty, like the bog pools I remembered from my childhood. Floating on the surface of the pond was something that looked like a doll's arm. When I bent to fish it out, all shape of an arm left it, ran off it with the droplets of black water, and I found myself holding a bone. It could, of course, have been an entirely unremarkable bone, one of non-human provenance, a bone that was no more than a discarded chicken drumstick, but as I let it fall back into the water, I knew that it wasn't.

*

I fear that I may not be the Project for much longer. Recently, on the balcony of 605, I heard a noise like a grinding of pistons, a chugging, a rush of air, and imagined that I felt the building shudder beneath me. The crowd on the pavement gasped as I grabbed the railing to steady myself. I didn't venture out the next noon, or the noon after that. On days when the wind is particularly high I find that my balance deserts me and I am overcome by a vertiginous feeling as if the Tower is swaying, as if somewhere, in some essential part of its structure, some vital component is working loose. And at night in my sleeping bag, even from a dozen floors up, I imagine that I hear the sloshing of water against the outer walls, the river creeping nearer and nearer.

Across the city, the Goldie Fish still stares, as haughty and domineering as ever. He will outlast me, that fish; deep down, I think I have always known this. Is he happy, I wonder, in his victory? He gives no sign, but this morning as I sat with my pea abacus at my feet, I looked across to the layered terraces of the Northside. I saw for the first time how they resembled banks of driftwood left behind when some vast flood receded, how their flights of crumbling steps looked like wave ridges. And it occurred to me that the fish, like me, is also waiting. There and then I wanted

to scale his steeple, un-spear him, run with him in my arms back along the quays and slip him over the dock wall into the water. So fierce was this urge that I jumped up from my chair letting out a small cry. As I did, my foot caught the jug, sending a hail of peas rattling across the floor. I only realised that I'd broken it when I looked down, saw it shattered at my feet in three quite perfect pieces.

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Elysian

Mary Noonan

Through green, I view the city's remains. Green
glass of this colossal tower, relic of the Tiger years
whose sole lodger is me, riding the crystal warship
high above what used to be the skyline, now
the water line. Pea green from pole to pole.

I spy with my little eye three green copper cupolas,
the crowns of City Hall, St Francis and the Courthouse
floating on moss-green clouds. A golden flying fish,
the city's flag, is still intact. I crouch above algal infinity,
a hawk plotting the horizon in vectors.

But my vantage is not safe. Bodies float by. Debris
of green cranes. At first, the floor show was all
uprooted trees, and cars. Then came the stampede.
Murders, cullings. I helped to fling the dead from
the penthouse balconies. Now I lie alone on cool marble.

The emerald light of evening floods the empty rooms,
long redundant. I listen for sounds, whirring of a lift
in the shaft, the whoosh of automatic doors.
Ghost lift, ghost doors. When I sleep, I go back
to the old city—

the mysteries of the timber yard on Water Street,
where my father worked; the temptations of the sidings
of the West Cork Railway on Albert Quay; the olive
majolica tiles of the Eglinton Street Swimming Baths,
bobbing before chlorine-pricked eyes;

our flat on Lower Road, where water rats danced
over our beds as we slept. My sister and I would play
at skipping on the docks, watching for the timber boats
coming up the river from Sweden, the banana boats
gliding in from Africa, or Jamaica. And we would wait

for hours in the rain to snatch our prize: rotting bananas
flung to us by the black sailors. That was our playground,
the port where Dutch merchants built their watery empire,
a market where Bordeaux wine was swapped for butter.
I close my eyes, try to conjure butter,

the faces of my father and my sister. Fields of flowers.
Elysian fields, where the gods went to die.

Perhaps… Afterwards

Kevin Griffin

(M. AGRIPPA. L. F. COS. TERTIUM. FECIT)*

Quid faciemus hodie, aedificator? Quid vis, Consul?
Video Insulam Magnam,
a great insula, a block of apartments, reaching to the sky,
a true Elysium, where even the patricians will rejoice,
we will have birds and rooftop gardens in the clouds,
with lights and dancing fountains, nymphs and satyrs, centaurs too.
What say you, *aedificator*?

A true *consilium ingeniosum*, Consul, but…
our cement isn't strong enough,
our beams are too weak,
our *machinae* for lifting are not tall enough,
nor are our best slaves skillful enough.

In Nomine Deorum, what can you do, *aedificator*?
I will build a rotunda,
circles and arches, brick on brick,
with a great dome as a roof,
with an oculus, an eye to look to the heavens.
It will be a true Pantheon, a earthly home for the Gods.

And what about my *propositum*, my dream of heaven, built on earth?
Consul, the augur sees, after a time of mists and silences,
a place, a *statio bene fide carinis*,
where your dream will rise,
where skillful, learned men will build your vision.
High above the *urbs*, it will touch the clouds
and then its terrible excellence will be seen.
For now, entrust the Muses with your plans and dream
for that time and that place, that *saeculum aureum*.

* Inscription over the entrance to the Pantheon in Rome:

M Agrippa, son of Lucius, consul for third time, had built this. *quid faciemus, hodie*—what will we build today; *aedificator*—builder, architect; *quid vis*—what would you like; *video*—I see; *consilium ingeniosum*—wonderful plan; *machinae*—devices for lifting; *propositum*—grand plan; *oculus*—opening in the roof of the Pantheon, lit. an eye; *statio bene fide carinis*—a harbour safe for ships (motto of Cork); *saeculum aureum*—a golden age

The Cloud Architect

Matthew Geden

Instead of working I draw pictures, mountain
vistas or views from high windows over-
seeing the bottleneck below. I sketch
a monk adorned in saffron robes, he
contemplates the sunlight on St. Luke's
and the steel-grey rain comes thundering
in like a train. Moment to moment
the days pass, *the pine door isn't aware*
of spring, the dormers weather the storm
and cumulus radiatus crosses from sky to
sky, each one on the point of breakdown.
When night falls I slowly disappear,
the clouds dissolve in the dark and a
small orange sun flickers then fades away;
twilight consumes the tower that was there,
all that is solid melts into air.

#1 Crush

Eimear Ryan

They broke ground on the tower the week after Emma's tenth birthday. Back then, the city hummed with the sound of jackhammers and JCBs, so the extra noise didn't make much difference. She could see the site from her bedroom window. Their apartment building was named *Cois Laoi*, which implied a river view, but Emma's family's unit was at the back of the building. Emma didn't mind. She would rather watch the tower, growing floor by floor, than the brown grind of the river.

Her parents hated it. More Celtic Tiger bullshit, her father said. Where do we think we're living—Dubai or someplace? According to her older sister Lauren—who listened to Le Tigre and wanted to smash the patriarchy—the tower was a harem for developers to hide their mistresses. Her mother just thought it was an eyesore.

But Emma loved looking at the tower in the mornings before heading out to school. Everything else could be in flux—her parents arguing, her sister getting in trouble for staying out till all hours, her friend Rachel ignoring her—but the tower was always there, both the same and not. It grew incrementally, the orange cranes pivoting in tandem, the men in visi-vests like bugs against the tower's facade.

Emma was thirteen by the time it finally opened. By then, it felt as though it had always been there. When it finally shed its outer layer of scaffolding, Emma gasped.

The gleam of it. The hard edges. It was beautiful.

*

She began to collect pictures. Her dad was a court reporter, and every day he brought home a sheaf of newspapers in his arms—not just his own paper, but the competitors as well. He piled them all in an awkward corner of the living room between the DVD storage unit and the cupboard where the hoover was kept. Emma attacked the pile with a scissors and recycled the ragged remains of the

newspapers. Her mother was delighted with her.

She learned quickly that the business and property supplements were the best bets, although the tower showed up occasionally in the main news section as well. Some photos featured the developer standing at the foot of the tower, beaming proudly in pinstripe suit. She carefully scissored him out of the image.

She thought about tacking the pictures on her bedroom wall, but that that felt too blatant, somehow—and anyway, she had a view of the real thing. Instead, she pasted photos of the tower into scrapbooks, saving the best ones for a collage on the back of her wardrobe door. A secret glimpse on cold winter mornings, while she dressed.

She bought cheap canvasses of skyscrapers from Dunnes and Penneys for her walls. The skylines of American cities kept her tower company, but paled in comparison to the view from her window. Her father thought she was taking an interest in city planning, and began calling her his little architect. That was before he lost his job and was still able to joke around with her.

*

Everyone in her year was starting to go off with each other. Rachel shifted Brian Finnerty for two weeks solid, and there was a rumour that Jenny Earner had done it with a Transition Year. At the discos that Emma only occasionally attended—the press of gyrating bodies made her claustrophobic—it seemed like everyone was desperate to pair off, and it didn't really matter with who. She watched boys work their way around groups of girls, asking each of them in turn until someone said yes. Nobody ever asked Emma, but she didn't mind. She wondered about that sometimes—if she *should* mind.

*

Emma moved her desk under her window so she could look at the tower while she did her homework. She allowed herself a glance up after every maths problem. When night fell, the tower became a faint outline, only the spire visible. It reminded her of a lightsaber, all blue and neon in the dark.

It'll be a mile-high ghost estate in a few years, her father said. Mark my words. Emma felt a sting at that. She found herself defending the tower. Give it a chance, she said. Her father snorted: That tower is everything that's wrong with this country.

Someone bought the penthouse after a while. There were stories it cost two million. Now the upper floor was drenched in light till the small hours, and Emma would keep vigil at her desk, half fascinated, half envious. Her friend Jason from downstairs told her the rumour: a rich old lady lived up there. She never leaves the apartment, Jason said—has all her groceries and shit delivered. She just stays up there on her own, drinking gin and smoking fags and looking down over the city. How Jason knew this, Emma had no idea. She never caught sight of the woman, not even when she used the toy binoculars she'd had since she was a kid.

A few months later, the lights went out. Jason told her a graphic and unlikely story about how the oul wan had died, but Emma liked to think that she'd just moved out—to a quiet house in a leafy suburb, maybe. The tower seemed lonely without her.

*

Her father kept his habits. He still went out to the Spar on the corner in the morning and returned with a sheaf of papers. Other things were cut back on, of course, but not the newspapers. When Emma grew out of her Nikes, the replacements came from Dunnes. She overheard Rachel sneering about them in school one day, but pretended not to notice.

When a glance at the jobs section yielded nothing, her father would sit in his corner armchair, stubbornly leafing through the pages and announcing misprints and badly-written headlines to no one in particular. As ever, Emma came quietly after him, scavenging for photos of the tower.

Then one day, a coincidence, or maybe even fate.

It was in one of the tabloids. A headline that sent a gust through her: *Shop assistant falls in love with Statue of Liberty*. There was a picture of a pretty blonde woman sitting in a living room festooned with American flags and plastic Statue of Liberty replicas.

She is my long distance lover, says Miranda, 27. Other

people might be shocked to think I could have romantic feelings for a statue, but Libby fulfils my sexual and emotional needs.

Emma gripped the newsprint taut. Her father had drilled the basics of reporting into her. Who, what, where, when and why—the Five Ws, he called them. This newspaper hadn't bothered with the why. They'd tried to make Miranda look stupid. They hadn't asked her anything *real.*

But still. There were others like her. Maybe that was enough, for now.

*

She did some googling. The family computer was in the living room, horribly exposed. She tensed every time someone drifted in or out, rapidly switching to an innocuous tab—tumblr or Buzzfeed or Goodreads. She always made sure to erase her history.

It turned out there was a word for what she was feeling, but Emma hated the term—it sounded like something your doctor would say to you. There were so many stories. A German woman who'd gotten married to the Berlin Wall. A guy from Bristol who'd fallen in love with his curvaceous 1968 Volkswagen Beetle. Bridges, pylons, fairground rides—there were people who loved them all.

The most outspoken, the most media-savvy, were Miranda Liberty and Katrina Eiffel. She tried out the name: Emma Elysian. It sounded comic, like a children's TV character. It sounded like it was meant to be.

*

Later, when she joined 'the community', she allowed herself to feel smug. *I <3 yr name!* another member would say. *But I'm not familiar w/ yr beloved?* There were a dozen Mrs Chryslers on the forums, women who'd fallen for big, obvious, picture-postcard beauty. She felt superior to Penny Pisa and Amy Acropolis. She thought them delusional, as bad as her friend Rachel who was convinced she was going to marry Zac Efron when she grew up. She was grateful for the message boards, the solidarity they offered, but she suspected that she was different from the others. The tower was Emma's

alone. Who else could see their beloved from their bedroom window?

*

It was Lauren who discovered them. Lauren, who was at UCC now and studying something Emma wasn't entirely clear on. Lauren who was hardly even at home anymore. She came looking in Emma's wardrobe for a skirt she thought Emma had borrowed. They never even swapped clothes; they were not those kind of sisters.

Emma was on the computer in the living room when she heard Lauren's hoots of laughter. She walked to her room calmly, as if for execution.

Lauren was bent double on the bed. Oh Jesus, Emma, she gasped. I've found your—your—*shrine*!

Emma didn't need to look. She knew what was on the back of the wardrobe door. Her very favourite pictures. Her stupid, girlish selfies with the tower in the background. Her small, pathetic hopes.

It's just too good, Lauren managed, between laughing fits. You're obsessed with a—with a—*giant phallus*!

When she took off laughing again, Emma lunged. She crossed the room and slapped her sister across the face.

Lauren grasped her cheek tenderly where Emma had struck her. Asked: What was *that* for?

She's a girl, Emma said. Not a phallus.

Lauren's look of shock went soft. Turned to pity, Emma realised.

She asked Lauren not to mention any of this to their parents, but just in case, she got rid of everything—the stuff in the wardrobe, the scrapbooks—all of it went into a big Guineys bag. She took a walk through the city, stuffing the pages furtively into street bins, a lump in her throat as she did so, reminding herself that she still had the view. No matter what, she had the view.

In the end, Lauren never breathed a word.

*

Jason from downstairs grew tall and blocky—a brick shithouse, her father called him. He also began looking at Emma differently, as though through a gauzy filter. He started asking her if she wanted to hang out after school, and she knew he meant something different to the hanging out they'd always done. She turned him down at first, but she tried on the feeling—whether she could learn to enjoy being looked at like that.

Then one evening after school, Jason didn't ask—he just took her hand.

They left the city centre, walking up Barrack Street as far as the Lough. They walked around it once, picking their way through the geese and seagulls and pigeons, her palm sweaty in Jason's big, soft, fleshy hand. There were clusters of students sitting on the benches, and Emma prayed that Lauren wasn't among them. He walked her home afterwards along the familiar quays. She could see the tower out of the corner of her eye, poking up behind City Hall. It was completely abandoned now—they'd stopped even trying to find tenants.

I know everyone hates it, Jason said, but I always quite liked it. The Elysian I mean.

Emma felt her heart quicken. Me too, she wanted to say.

Instead she said: Remember the story you told me about the old woman in the penthouse?

He laughed. Wanna check if she's still there?

Jason was good at breaking into places, it turned out. There was a service door that gave way if you put your shoulder to it. He and his mates drank in there sometimes, he told her. Sure enough, in the dark hallway Emma could make out crushed brightly-coloured cans, like foliage underfoot. She walked gingerly forward, arms outstretched, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the darkness. Jason put a guiding hand on the small of her back. At the end of the hallway, the walls fanned out into an open space. She could see the curve of a long concierge desk and the glint of an elevator.

The lifts still work and everything, Jason was saying. My mate Rich says he got upstairs once, that all the apartments are just as they were—beds, fridges, flowers on the table, fluffy towels in the loo. I think he's bullshitting though.

Emma was getting better at seeing in the darkness. She felt her way around the concierge desk, sat in the padded office chair, spun gently. They'd left pens and paper clips behind, a nest of cables, a stray computer mouse. It made her sad to see the tower abandoned like this. And yet, she'd finally crossed the threshold. *I'm here*, she said in her mind—*I'm inside you.*

So, what do you think? whispered Jason.

She said nothing but grabbed him and kissed him and pulled him to the floor.

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About the Editors

Graham Allen is Professor of English at University College Cork, Ireland. His critical works include *Harold Bloom: A Poetics of Conflict* (1994), *Intertextuality* (2000, 2nd Ed. 2011), *Roland Barthes* (2003), *Mary Shelley* (2008) and *A Reader's Guide to Frankenstein* (2008). He was winner of the 2010 Listowel Poetry Prize and has been shortlisted for various awards, including the Listowel First Collection Prize 2008, the Crashaw Poetry Prize for 2013, the 2014 Fool for Poetry Prize, and the Shine/Strong First Collection Prize 2015. His collections of print poetry, *The One That Got Away* (2014) and *The Madhouse System* (2016), are published by New Binary Press.

Billy Ramsell was born in Cork in 1977 and educated at the North Monastery and UCC. He has published two collections of poetry with the Dedalus Press, *Complicated Pleasures* in 2007 and *The Architect's Dream of Winter* in 2013, which was shortlisted for the Irish Times Poetry Now Award. He was awarded the Chair of Ireland Bursary for 2013 and the Poetry Ireland Residency Bursary for 2015. He has been invited to read his work at many festivals and literary events around the world. He lives in Cork where he co-runs an educational publishing company.

Notes on Contributors

Paul Casey's poetry has been performed and published in many countries. His most recent collection, *Virtual Tides,* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2016. This followed *home more or less* (Salmon, 2012) and his debut chapbook *It's Not all Bad* (Heaventree Press, 2009). In August 2017 he was commissioned to write a poem in response to a soundscape for RTE radio and his poems were translated into Galician by Daniel Salgado and published as a chapbook, *Poemas* (Malinche Press, June 2017). He also produced a poetry-film in 2010 based on Ian Duhig's poem The Lammas Hireling, which has been screened at numerous International festivals and used as a teaching aide at the Sorbonne. He curates and edits the annual Unfinished Book of Poetry for Cork City Libraries and Arts Office, featuring writing from five secondary schools each year, and is the founder/director of Ó Bhéal in Cork, at www.obheal.ie.

Patrick Cotter has published several chapbooks, and three books of poetry *The Misogynist's Blue Nightmare* (Raven Arts Press, 1990), *Perplexed Skin* (Arlen House 2007) and *Making Music* (Three Spires 2008). His poems have been translated into over a dozen languages. His work is represented in many anthologies. In 2013 he received the Keats Shelley Poetry Prize. He has published poems in *the Financial Times, London Review of Books, PN Review, Poetry* (USA), *Poetry Review, Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry Wales* and many other places. In 2015 he guest-edited an Irish issue of *Poetry* (USA). He has appeared at poetry festivals across the Northern Hemisphere.

Cónal Creedon is a novelist, playwright and documentary film maker. Creedon's published books are *Pancho and Lefty Ride Out* (1995), *Passion Play* (1999), *Second City Trilogy* (2007), and *The Immortal Deed Of Michael O'Leary* (2015). Translations include German, Bulgarian and Italian. His stage plays include *The Trial Of Jesus* [2000], *Glory Be To The Father* (2002), *After Luke* (2005), *When I Was God* (2005), *The Cure* (2005). Creedon has been awarded two Irish National Business To Arts Awards (2000) and was shortlisted for

the Irish Times Theatre Awards (2000). His *Second City Trilogy* received high critical acclaim at World Expo Shanghai (2010) and The JUE Festival Shanghai (2011), and was premiered in the USA at the Irish Repertory Theatre, New York (2009) to critical acclaim in *The New York Times*, receiving New York Irish Theatre Awards for Best Director, Best Actor, as well as the nomination for Best Playwright. Creedon has written over 60 hours of radio drama, broadcast on RTÉ and the BBC, while he is also an awarding-winning documentary filmmaker.

James Cummins talks about and writes poems but not at the same time. His books include *Warbler* (DEFAULT, 2009), *speaking off centre* (livestock editions / dusie, 2009), *FLASH/BANG* (Veer, 2011) and *origin of proces*s (Wild Honey, 2011).

Kathy D'Arcy is a Cork poet (*Encounter* 2010, *The Wild Pupil* 2012) currently completing an IRC-funded Creative Writing PhD at University College Cork, where she teaches with the Women's Studies department. In 2013 she received an Arts Council Literature Bursary for her poem Camino. She has worked as a doctor and youth worker as well as teaching creative writing. Her play *This is my Constitution* was staged in 2013 at an Irish parliamentary briefing on gender. In 2016 she won the Hippocrates Prize and was longlisted for the Ivan Juritz prize for experimental poetry. She was 2016 editor of the *Cork Literary Review* and is current editor of *Rhyme Rag* (an online poetry journal for young people). She is involved in the Irish Pro-Choice campaign.

Madeleine D'Arcy's début short story collection, *Waiting For The Bullet* (Doire Press, 2014), won the Edge Hill Readers' Choice Prize 2015 (UK). In 2010 she received a Hennessy Literary Award for First Fiction and the overall Hennessy Literary Award for New Irish Writer. She holds an MA in Creative Writing (First Class Honours) from University College, Cork. Madeleine and Danielle McLaughlin co-host Fiction at the Friary, a free monthly fiction event in Cork City, on the final Sunday of every month.

Cal Doyle's poetry has appeared in *The Stinging Fly*, *gorse* & *Poetry* (Chicago). He lives in Cork.

Julie Field is a Cork born bilingual writer & poet who holds an MPhil in Modern Irish. Her publications include poetry in *Comhar*, *Feasta*, *Southword*, and *The Examiner*, as well as articles in *The Echo* and *West Kerry Live*. Julie is also a well-established, award winning Slam Poet who goes by the name of 'Julie Goo'. Goo performs at various festivals and conferences, including Electric Picnic, Body & Soul, Eastrogen Rising, Indiependence, Tedx Cork, and many more. Goo's poetry has been adapted for theatre, quoted in fiction and, in 2016 Goo collaborated with Aisling Keating to make a poetry film of her poem 'Laundry', based on the Magdalene Laundries. Julie's work as an artist dives into the beauty and darkness in life. Themes such as conformity, discrimination, gender politics, and ideas of 'normality' are explored with sensitivity and humour. You can follow her journey on Julie Goo's Facebook Page or You Tube Channel.

Fergal Gaynor is a poet, critic and independent scholar. He also edits, with Ed Krčma, the art magazine *Enclave Review*, now in its seventh year of publication. A selection of poetry written from 1999-2010 can be found in *VIII Stepping Poems & other pieces*, published by Miami University Press in 2011. More recently, Gaynor's 'The Octagon' appeared in the 'Irish Experimental Poetry' edition of the *Irish University Review* (May 2016).

Matthew Geden was born and brought up in the English Midlands, moving to Kinsale in 1990. His most recent collection is *The Place Inside* published by Dedalus Press. He is the Director of Kinsale Writing School.

Kevin Griffin is a retired secondary teacher and has been writing poetry since his retirement. He has had poems published in *Crannog*, *The SHOp*, *Revival*, *Boyne Berries*, *Riposte*, *Stony Thursday*, *Labour of Love* (Toronto), *Salzburg Review*, *Orbis* and *North West Words*. He is a regular reader at various venues in Kerry, Cork, Limerick and Galway and has featured on Radio Kerry.

Sarah Hayden's chapbooks so far are *Exteroceptive* (Wild Honey), *System Without Issue* (Oystercatcher) and most recently *Turnpikes* (Sad Press), with other poems having appeared in *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *Steamer*, *Internal Leg* and *Cutlery Review*, *Tripwire*, on datableed and in various other fine places. She writes with and for artists and art events. She is a Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Southampton, where she directs the Centre for Modern and Contemporary Writing and runs the Entropics reading series. Her first book, *Curious Disciplines: Mina Loy and Avant-Garde Artisthood*, will be out in April 2018.

Paul Hegarty is associate professor of French at University College Cork, and has written extensively on matters theoretical and musical, while dabbling in the architectural. His most recent book is *Peter Gabriel: Global Citizen* (Reaction, 2018) and his next one, co-written with Sarah Hayden, is entitled *Peter Roehr: Field Pulsations* (Daimler/Snoek, 2018).

Joseph Horgan was born in Birmingham, England, of Irish immigrant parents from Cork. He has lived in Cork since 1999. Amongst other credits he is a past winner of The Patrick Kavanagh Award, has been the recipient of an Arts Council Bursary, been shortlisted for a Hennessy Award and been nominated for a Ted Hughes Award. He is the author of three collections and a prose work that was serialised on RTE Radio One. He is an enthusiastic collaborator and a multi-media work, *Reading In Public Places*, will be launched in west Cork next year. His pamphlet collection, *21*, will be published next year by Flarestack Press. He writes a weekly column for *The Irish Post* and is the current recipient of the Poetry Ireland Tyrone Guthrie Residency Bursary.

Victoria Kennefick's pamphlet, *White Whale* (Southword Editions, 2015), won the Munster Literature Centre Fool for Poetry Chapbook Competition and the Saboteur Award for Best Poetry Pamphlet 2016. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Poetry News*, *Prelude*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The Irish Times*, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of a Next Generation Artist Bursary

from the Arts Council of Ireland and is a tutor at The Poetry School.

Dr Denis Linehan is a Senior Lecturer in Cultural Geography at University College Cork. His research interests address issues around Urbanism, Culture and the Built Environment, Landscape and Society and Critical Topography. His book collaborations include *Atlas of Cork City* (CUP, 2011), *Spacing Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2016) and *Ordnance: War, Architecture and Space* (Ashgate, 2016).

Jennifer Matthews writes poetry and is the founding editor of *Long Story, Short Journal*. Originally from Missouri, USA she has been living in Ireland since 2003, and is a citizen of both countries. Her poetry has been published in *Poethead, Poetry International — Ireland, The Stinging Fly, Mslexia, The Pickled Body, Burning Bush 2, Abridged, The Irish Examiner, The Penny Dreadful, Banshee, Cork Literary Review* and more. Her work has been anthologised in *Landing Places* (Dedalus, 2010); *New Planet Cabaret* (New Island, 2013); *Looking at the Stars* (Southword Editions, 2016); *Deep Heart's Core* (Dedalus, 2016); and *Washing Windows* (Arlen House, 2017). In 2015 she was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series, and her manuscript *Home, Body* was highly commended in the Patrick Kavanagh competition in 2016. *Rootless*, a chapbook of her poetry, is available to read free online at http://smithereenspress.com.

Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was a Fellow of the International Writing Programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. His work has been published in *The Irish Times*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *London Magazine*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *Poetry Review* (London) and many other journals. He has published *The First Convention* (Dolmen Press, 1978), *The Sorrow Garden* (Anvil Poetry, 1981), *Lost Province* (Anvil Poetry, 1996), *Merchant Prince* (Anvil Poetry, 2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (Anvil Poetry, 2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels, *Without Power* (Poolbeg, 1981) and *Asya and Christine*

(Poolbeg, 1992) as well as two works of non-fiction, *Gardens of Remembrance* (New Island, 1996) and *Out of the Ashes* (Cork City Libraries, 2006). His new collection, *Pandemonium*, was published by Carcanet Press in 2016. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds *Annual Literary Award*. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries before he began to write fulltime in 2014. He is a member of Aosdána.

Frank McDonald is a Dubliner and UCD graduate who was Environment Editor of *The Irish Times* from 2000 until he "retired" in 2015. He is also author of several books including *The Destruction of Dublin* (1985), *Saving the City* (1989) and *The Construction of Dublin* (2000), and joint author with James Nix of *Chaos at the Crossroads* (2005), which documented the environmental destruction of Ireland during the boom years, and with Kathy Sheridan of *The Builders* (2008), profiling the developers and others involved in the so-called Celtic Tiger's casino culture. A regular contributor to radio and television programmes, he won the Outstanding Work in Irish Journalism award in 1979 for a series of articles in *The Irish Times* entitled "Dublin: What went wrong?" as well as the Lord Mayor's Millennium Medal (1988) and two National Media Awards (1999 and 2003). He was conferred with an honorary DPhil by Dublin Institute of Technology in 2006, honorary membership of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (2010), honorary fellowship of the Royal Institute of British Architects (2011) and honorary life membership of the National Union of Journalists in 2014. He was also a Press Fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge, in 2008, and a founder member of the Academy of Urbanism.

Danielle McLaughlin's stories have appeared in newspapers and magazines such as *The Stinging Fly, The Irish Times, Southword, Long Story Short,* and *The New Yorker*. Her debut collection of short stories *Dinosaurs on Other Planets* was published in Ireland by *The Stinging Fly Press* in 2015, and in the UK (John Murray), US (Random House) and Slovakia (Inaque) in 2016. She is currently a Visiting Writer Fellow at the Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College. Together with Madeleine D'Arcy, she co-runs Fiction at the Friary, a monthly

fiction event in Cork which takes place at the Friary Bar, North Mall on the last Sunday of every month.

Conor McManus has had work published in *The Moth*, *Crannog*, *Stinging Fly*, *Force Ten*, *The Linnets Wing*, *The Leitrim Guardian*. He has read on RTE radio, and in the U.K. as part of an artist exchange programme. Has had his story 'Tea Break' read by a troupe of actors in a public performance at the Glens Centre, Manorhamilton. He has been shortlisted for the Fish Short Story competition on two occasions and won a bursary to the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in 2008. He wrote and co-produced *Crow*, with Colm Scully, a poetry film shortlisted for the Indie Cork Film Festival 2014 and has been screened in Cork, Kiev and Massachusetts. Presently, when he's not hunting for a publisher he's being a builder.

Mary Morrissy is the author of three novels, *Mother of Pearl*, *The Pretender* and *The Rising of Bella Casey* and two collections of stories, *A Lazy Eye* and most recently*, Prosperity Drive*. *Mother of Pearl*, her first novel, was shortlisted for the Whitbread Award (now Costa) and *The Pretender* and *The Rising of Bella Casey* have both been nominated for the Dublin Impac International Literary Award. Her short fiction has been anthologised widely and won her a Hennessy Award. In 1995 she was awarded the prestigious US Lannan Award which honours writers whose work "is of exceptional quality". She is the Associate Director of Creative Writing at University College Cork and a member of Aosdána.

E. R. Murray lives in West Cork, Ireland, where she fishes, grows her own vegetables and lives for adventures and words. Elizabeth is an award-winning writer of novels for children and young adults. She also has short fiction and poetry published in literary journals across Ireland, the UK, and Australia, as well as numerous shortlists in fiction competitions including Aesthetica Creative Works, Francis McManus and Penguin/Irish Times. Her debut novel, *The Book of Learning – Nine Lives Trilogy 1* was the 2016 Dublin UNESCO Citywide Read for Children, while *The Book of Shadows – Nine Lives Trilogy 2* was shortlisted for the 2016 Irish Book awards. She has also performed in the live writing installation Train: Ciudades Parallelas

at Cork Midsummer festival and co-created/performed Things That Go Bump in the Night, an interactive storytelling event with author Caroline Busher. Her residencies include Varuna (Australia), Gullkistan (Iceland) and la Muse (France).

Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh writes in the Irish language. Her poetry collections are *Péacadh* (2008) and *Tost agus Allagar* (2016), both published by Coiscéim. A bilingual collection, *The Coast Road*, was published by Gallery Press and features translations by 13 poets. It is shortlisted for the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation.

Doireann Ní Ghríofa is a bilingual writer living and working in Cork. Her fifth book is Oighear (Coiscéim, 2017) and a collaborative book of poetry and art made with artist Alice Maher will soon be published by The Salvage Press. Doireann is Commissioned Writer for Temple Bar Gallery + Studios 2018, Artist-in-Residence for Cork Midsummer Festival 2018-2019, and Associate of Trinity College Centre for Literary Translation, Dublin. Among her awards are the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the Michael Hartnett Award.

Mary Noonan's first collection, *The Fado House*, was published in 2012 by Dedalus Press, and was subsequently shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize for a First Collection (2013) and the Strong/Shine Award (2013). The manuscript of *The Fado House* won the Listowel Poetry Collection Prize in 2010. Her poems have been published in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Review, PN Review, Poetry London, New Hibernia Review, The Dark Horse, The Well Review, The North, Southword*, *The Stinging Fly, The Threepenny Review, Blackbox Manifold*, *And Other Poems* and *The Spectator*. A selection of her poems is available at the on-line audio-archive *fishousepoems.org*. She was awarded a Literature Bursary by the Arts Council of Ireland in 2014. A limited edition pamphlet, *Father*, was published by Bonnefant Press in 2015. Her second collection is forthcoming from Dedalus Press. She teaches French literature at University College Cork.

Colm Ó Ceallacháin has published stories in *Comhar*, *Feasta*, *Southword* and *gorse*. He has won awards in Oireachtas literary

competitions. The Arts Council awarded him a bursary in 2013 in Litríocht na Gaeilge. He lives in Cork, where he works with young people. *I dtír mhilis na mbeo* (Cois Life, 2017) is his first collection of short stories.

Billy O'Callaghan was born in Cork in 1974, and is the author of three short story collections: *In Exile* (2008, Mercier Press); *In Too Deep* (2009, Mercier Press); and *The Things We Lose, The Things We Leave Behind* (2013, New Island Books), which was honoured with a *Bord Gais Energy* Irish Book Award and selected as Cork's 'One City, One Book' for 2017. A novella, *A Death in the Family*, was published in November 2017 as a Ploughshares Solo; and his first novel, *The Dead House*, was published by Brandon Books, an imprint of O'Brien Press, in 2017, and is forthcoming in the United States in 2018, from Arcade/Skyhorse. He has won/been short-listed for numerous honours both in Ireland and abroad, most recently the 2016 *Costa* Short Story Award, and more than a hundred of his stories have appeared in such literary journals and magazines around the world as: the Chattahoochee Review, the Fiddlehead, Hayden's Ferry Review, the Kenyon Review, Kyoto Journal, the London Magazine, the Los Angeles Review, Narrative, Salamander and the Saturday Evening Post. He also served as the 2016 Writer-in-Residence for the Cork County Libraries.

Eimear Ryan's writing has appeared in *Winter Papers, Granta, The Dublin Review, gorse, The Stinging Fly,* and the anthologies *The Long Gaze Back* (New Island) and *Town & Country* (Faber). She is co-editor of the literary journal *Banshee*. From Co. Tipperary, she lives in Cork.

Susan Tomaselli is the founder and editor of *gorse* journal. She lives in Dublin.

David Toms now lives and works in Norway after spending most of the last decade in Cork, and a period in Prague. His poetry has appeared in a wide variety of magazines and journals in English and translation. He is working on a second collection.

Rachel Warriner is a poet and art historian. She has published the poetry books *Primary* (DEFAULT), *Detritus* (DEFAULT/Dusie Press), *Eleven Days* (Runamok Press) and *Fine Lament* (Critical Documents). Her scholarly texts have been published in journals such as *Artefact*, *Courtauld Books Online,* and *The Irish University Review* and her book *Pain and Politics in Postwar Feminist Art: Activism in the work of Nancy Spero* is forthcoming from IB Tauris.

The Elysian: Creative Responses brings together established and emergent writers from Cork's vibrant literary scene. Poets, fiction writers and essayists direct their creative lens on what is now, at least vertically, Cork's standout architectural edifice. The result is a fascinating glimpse into the imaginative culture of Cork over, and now in some ways, beyond, the period of the recent economic crisis.

New Binary Press

ISBN 978-0-9935803-5-2