

JOAN HEWITT
make common cause with the natives, in their hearts
hoping to win a truce when the tribes assert
their ancient right and take what once was theirs.
Already from other lands the legions ebb
and men no longer know the Roman peace.

Alone, I have a harder row to hoe:
I think these natives human, think their code,
though strange to us, and farther from the truth,
only a little so - to be redeemed
if they themselves rise up against the spells
and fears their celibates surround them with.
I find their symbols good, as such, for me,
when I walk in dark places of the heart,
but name them not to be misunderstood.
I know no vices they monopolise,
if we allow the forms by hunger bred,
the sores of old oppression, the deep skill
in all evasive acts, the swaddled minds,
admit our load of guilt - I mourn the trees
more than as symbol - and would make amends
by fraternising, by small friendly gestures,
hoping by patient words I may convince
my people and this people we are changed
from the raw levies which usurped the land,
if not to kin, to co-inhabitants,
as goat and ox may graze in the same field
and each gain something from proximity:
for we have rights drawn from the soil and sky,
the use, the pace, the patient years of labour,
the rain against the lips, the changing light,
the heavy clay-sucked stride, have altered us;
we would be strangers in the Capitol;
this is our country also, nowhere else;
and we shall not be outcast on the world.

CLOTTY (ED)
NOBELN IRLISH POETRY, 2003

SUBSTANCE AND SHADOW

There is a bareness in the images
I temper time with in my mind's defence;
they hold their own, their stubborn secretcies;
no use to rage against their reticence:
a gannet's plunge, a heron by a pond,
a last rook homing as the sun goes down,
a spider squatting on a bracken-frond,
and thistles in a cornsheaf's tufted crown,
a boulder on a hillside, lichen-stained,
the sparks of sun on dripping icicles,
their durable significance contained
in texture, colour, shape, and nothing else.
All these are sharp, spare, simple, native to
this small republic I have charted out
as the sure acre where my sense is true,
while round its boundaries sprawl the screes of doubt.

My lamp lights up the kettle on the stove
and throws its shadow on the whitewashed wall,
like some Assyrian profile with, above,
a snake, or bird-prowed helmet crested tall;
but this remains a shadow; when I shift
the lamp or move the kettle it is gone,
the substance and the shadow break adrift
that needed bronze to lock them, bronze or stone.

AN IRISHMAN IN COVENTRY

A full year since, I took this eager city,
the tolerance that laced its blatant roar,
its famous steeples and its web of girders,
as image of the state hope argued for,
and scarcely flung a bitter thought behind me
on all that flaws the glory and the grace
which ribbons through the sick, guilt-clotted legend
of my creed-haunted, godforsaken race.
My rhetoric swung round from steel's high promise

JOHN KEENE

to the precision of the well-gauged tool,
tracing the logic in the vast glass headlands,
the clockwork horse, the comprehensive school.

Then, sudden, by occasion's chance concerted,
in enclave of my nation, but apart,
the jigging dances and the lilting fiddle
stirred the old rage and pity in my heart.
The faces and the voices blurring round me,
the strong hands long familiar with the spade,
the whiskey-tinctured breath, the pious buttons,
called up a people endlessly betrayed
by our own weakness, by the wrongs we suffered
in that long twilight over bog and glen,
by force, by famine and by glittering fables
which gave us martyrs when we needed men,
by faith which had no charity to offer,
by poisoned memory, and by ready wit,
with poverty corroded into malice,
to hit and run and howl when it is hit.
This is our fate: eight hundred years' disaster,
crazily tangled as the Book of Kells;
the dream's distortion and the land's division,
the midnight raiders and the prison cells.
Yet like Lir's children banished to the waters
our hearts still listen for the landward bells.

A LOCAL POET

He followed their lilting stanzas
through a thousand columns or more,
and scratched for the splintered couplets
in the cracks on the cottage floor,
for his Rhyming Weavers fell silent
when they flocked through the factory door.

He'd imagined a highway of heroes
and stepped aside on the grass
to let Cuchullain's chariot through,

and the Starry Ploughmen pass;
but he met the Travelling Gunman
instead of the Galloglass.

And so, with luck, for a decade
down the widowed years ahead,
the pension which crippled his courage
will keep him in daily bread,
while he mourns for his mannerly verses
that had left so much unsaid.

EAVAN BOLAND (LANCE SLUSH)
 2003
 POETS IN ANIMATED MISE EN SCENE

I won't go back to it -
 my nation displaced
 into old dactyls,
 oaths made
 by the animal tallows
 of the candle -
 land of the Gulf Stream,
 the small farm,
 the scalded memory,
 the songs
 that bandage up the history,
 the words
 that make a rhythm of the crime
 where time is time past.
 A palsy of regrets.
 No. I won't go back.
 My roots are brutal:
 I am the woman -
 a sloven's mix
 of silk at the wrists
 a sort of dove-strut
 in the precincts of the garrison -
 who practises
 the quick frictions,
 the ricus of delight
 and gets cambrie for it,
 rice-coloured silks.
 I am the woman
 in the gansy-coat
 on board the *Mary Belle*,
 in the huddling cold,
 holding her half-dead baby to her
 as the wind shifts east
 and north over the
 water of the wharf

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mingling the immigrant
 guttural with the vowels
 of homesickness who neither
 knows or cares that
 a new language
 is a kind of scar
 and heals after a while
 into a passable imitation
 of what went before.

Listen. This is the Noise of Myth

This is the story of a man and a woman
 under a willow and beside a weir
 near a river in a wooded clearing.
 They are fugitives. Intimates of myth.
 Fictions of my purpose. I suppose
 I shouldn't say that yet or at least
 before I break their hearts or save their lives
 I ought to tell their stories and I will.
 When they went first it was winter; cold,
 cold through the Midlands and as far West
 as they could go. They knew they had to go -
 through Meath, Westmeath, Longford,
 their lives unravelling like the hours of light -
 and then there were lambs under the snow
 and it was January, aconite and jasmine
 and the hazel yellowing and puce berries on the ivy.
 They could not eat where they had cooked,
 nor sleep where they had eaten
 nor at dawn rest where they had slept.
 They shunned the densities

for Tríona and Máiréad Ní Dhomhnaill

Those in power write the history, those who suffer write the songs

Frank Hart

It was always those with little else to carry who carried the songs

to Babylon, to the Mississippi — some of these last possessed less than nothing did not own their own bodies yet, three centuries later, deep rhythms from Africa, stowed in their hearts, their bones, carry the world's songs.

For those who left my country, girls from Downings and the Rosses who followed herring boats north to Shetland gutting the sea's silver as they went or boys from Ranafast who took the Derry boat, who slept over a rope in a bothy, songs were their souls' currency, the pure metal of their hearts,

to be exchanged for other gold, other songs which rang out true and bright when flung down upon the deal boards of their days.

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A word does not head out alone. It is carried about the way something essential, a blade, say, or a bowl, is brought from here to there when there is work to be done. Sometimes, after a long journey, it is pressed into a different service.

A tree keeps its record. of the temper of years well hidden.

After the timber has been sawn rough rings release the song of the place — droughts, good summers, long frosts — the way pain and joy unlock in a voice.

NOYA CANON SONGS, 2007
ECLAIRING THE