



GILL AODÁIN & NOWHERE ELSE

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HAMBURG

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CILL AODÁIN & NOWHERE ELSE

By Terry McDonagh

Artwork: Sally McKenna

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The best journey to make is inward

R.S. Thomas.



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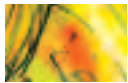
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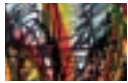
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PREFACE

The experience of *becoming* put into song and picture – the persistence of an evening blackbird belling a spring twilight – the exile at home in his away, away in his home, and seeking images to hold the spaces in-between – the surrender to the imagination immersed in the bogginess of place, in the certainties of place, in the absences of place – creating in the uncertain, a bright darkness of the spirit mind, the fairy mound, the woman Mary Hynes perhaps turning the corner on the road ahead.

Yeats said it is “always necessary to affirm and reaffirm that nationality is in the things that escape analysis.” In this personal journey away from and back, and away again and again, Terry McDonagh reaffirms things that escape our analysis in growing up, especially that extraordinary clasp on the psyche of birthplace and places where we have lived. His words will echo in some readers’ memories, or create images for others. Sally McKenna hears in these lines echoes of youth and age; and responds here with images that carry through a lifetime; from brightly coloured celebrations to those delicate swirlings of the ash, thornbush and oak, from her abstract or surreal insights to the actuality of people on the land, within the landscape. All her pictures discover the poet’s place. Here, in conversing word and picture, is Cill Aodáin of the mind, Cill Aodáin of all our minds on this ancient island where our tribes blooded land and people for affirmation, for generation.

Today we journey along a new and technologically washed terrain. Holding what we have made and not losing what we have

been offered by our past is difficult in slippery seasons. The poet or the painter is always transformed by making art, but not simply so; the words and the images become in turn agents of transformation, changing the air we breathe and the hills we walk. But things unveiled for us through art can open our brave new world, can reveal that place our bodies come from, where our souls are shaped. We can chant its past, we can seed its future, we can be, here in our own places.

Some seek elsewhere. For others, and for this poet, elsewhere becomes at the end of the day ‘nowhere else’ but where it all began. The sense of place, and its possibilities for the imagination, especially places we have flown from only to return again and again – ‘these are the tufts of delight in the dark muddle of November.’ Here we may live our lives of ‘sin and wrinkles’ and walk to ‘Benediction’.

Echoes offer tribute to the great Anthony Raftery of his home place, and also to a poet of our own time, Austin Clarke for whom men “Drank deep and were silent....”. McDonagh is not silent; and he promises to finish his poem, one way or another, in this life or the next. Cill Aodáin is why.

Seamus Cashman

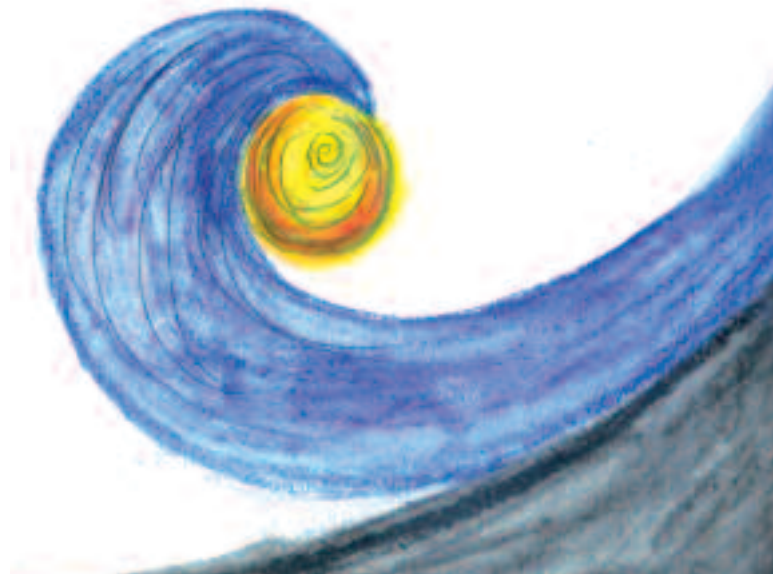
Poet and publisher Seamus Cashman founded the Irish literary publishing house Wolfhound Press in 1974 and was its publisher until 2001. His most recent poetry collection is *That morning will come* (Salmon Poetry, 2007). Other publications are *Proverbs & Sayings of Ireland*, *Irish Poems for Young People* (co-edited with Bridie Quinn) and the award winning *Something Beginning with P: new poems from Irish poets* (The O’Brien Press, 2004). He also works as a publishing consultant, editor and creative writing tutor.

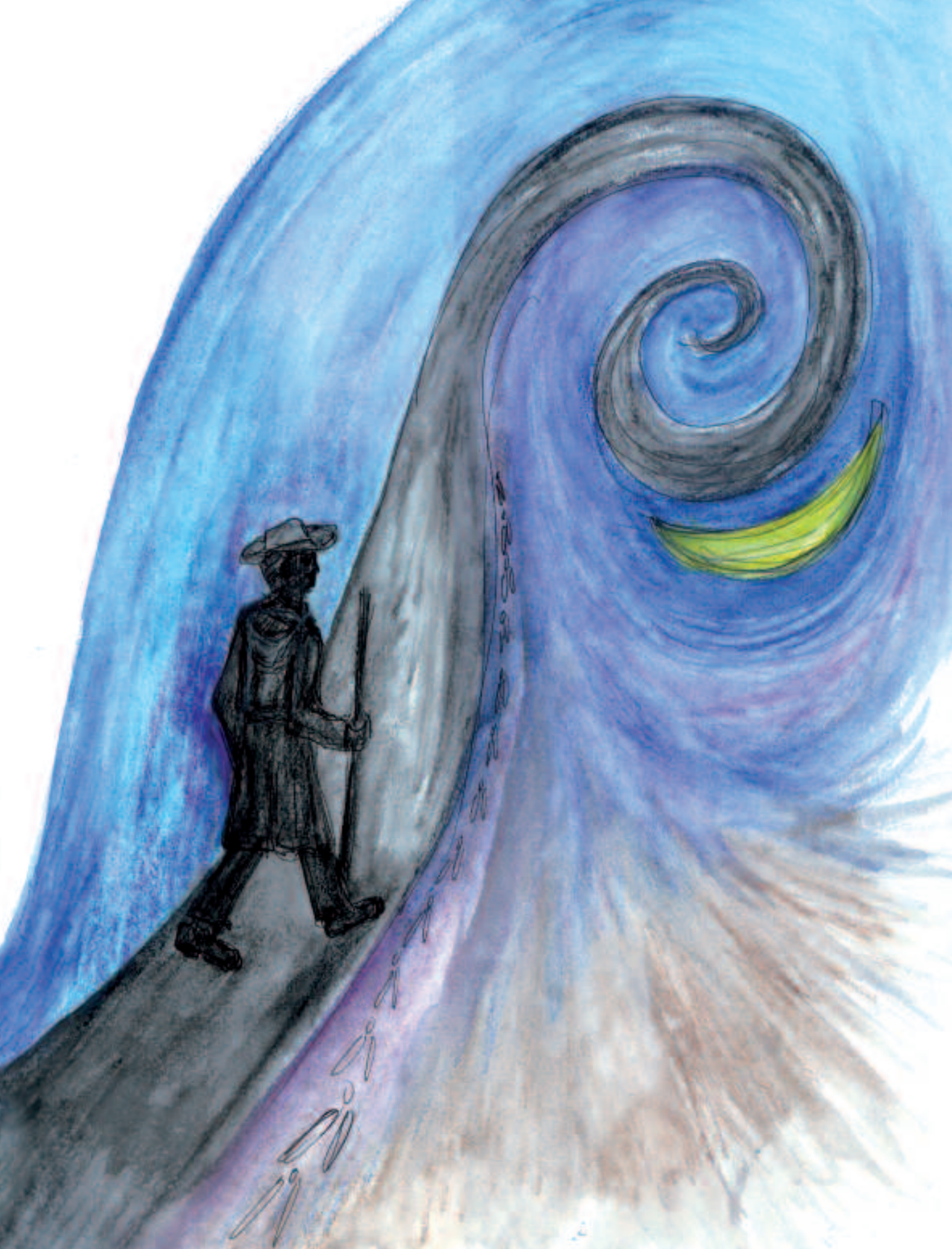




1 The great song of Cill Aodáin
was in full swing
when bones were weapons,
the universe was flat
and animal tracks were ghostly trails.

This countryside endured before
Eve listened to the snake; prior to
blushing, invasions, honeymoons and
Disneyland
— even before we learned
to draw back curtains to see the moon.
I set out from this place
it seems to turn to wherever I am.







2 No one said
this young man plays sweetly.
No one said
this young man can sing.
No one said
there's nothing better than the world
to give you an appetite
and
if you don't belong,
you're left outside
like a bike to rust and disappear
into nettles and briars.

But a person can be rapt in old things.
A person can delight in a day turning.







3 Heuston Station, Dublin. Three trains
have come and gone
and the fourth will run me
into the charging west wind.

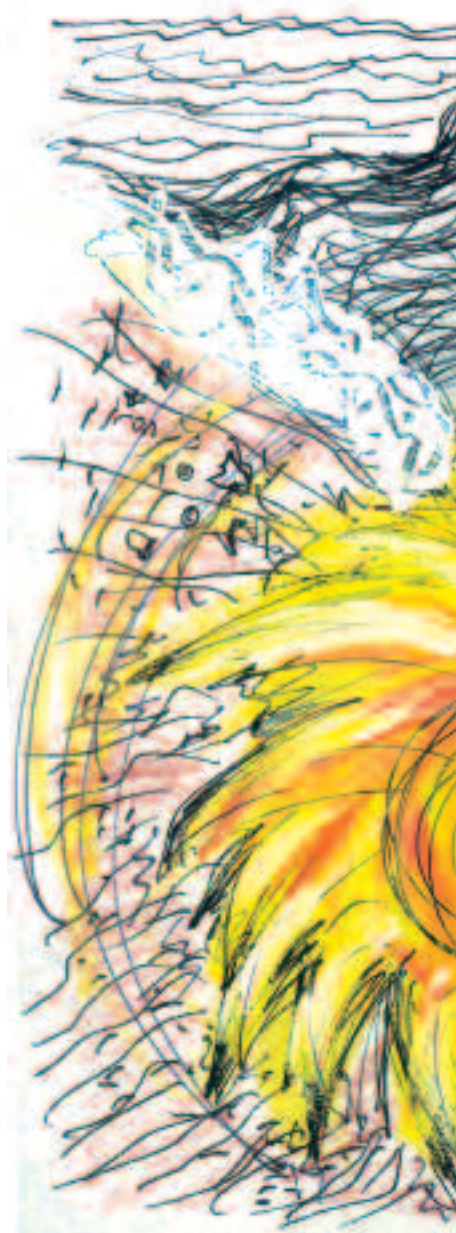
I am a man in a raincoat
with a backpack full of
transient clobber and a toothbrush.

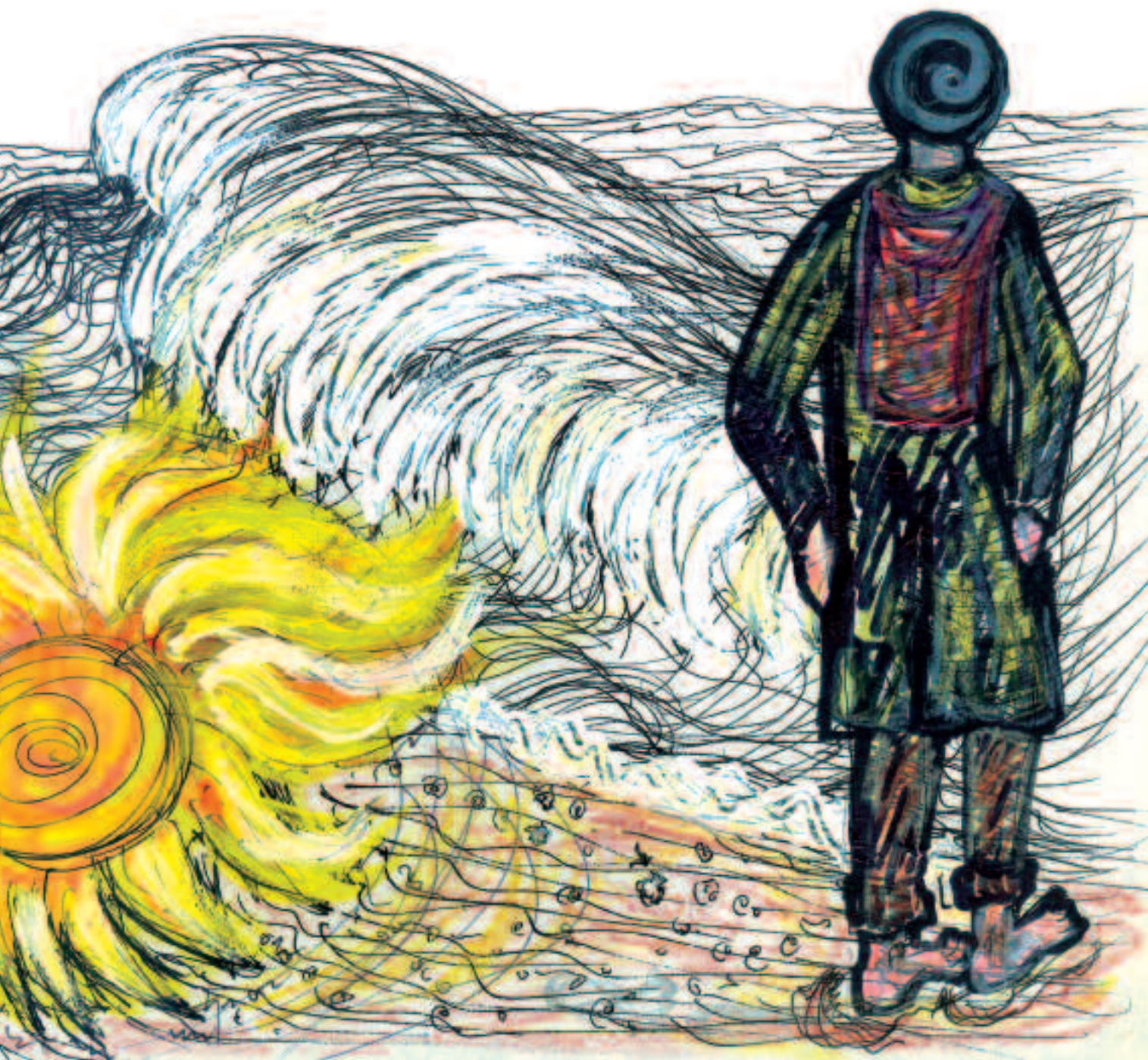
The sun, outside, spreads itself about
like a beauty on a blustery beach —
not avoiding me, not seeking me.

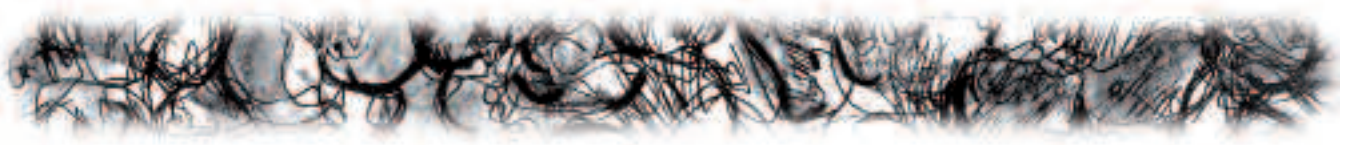
Tomorrow is tomorrow
and tomorrow's footprint.

Today is breath after tangled breath.

Now is now
in and out of step
with today.







4 Maybe I am a Wordsworth of the Wye
leaving scraps of paper and illusions behind
to fend for themselves.

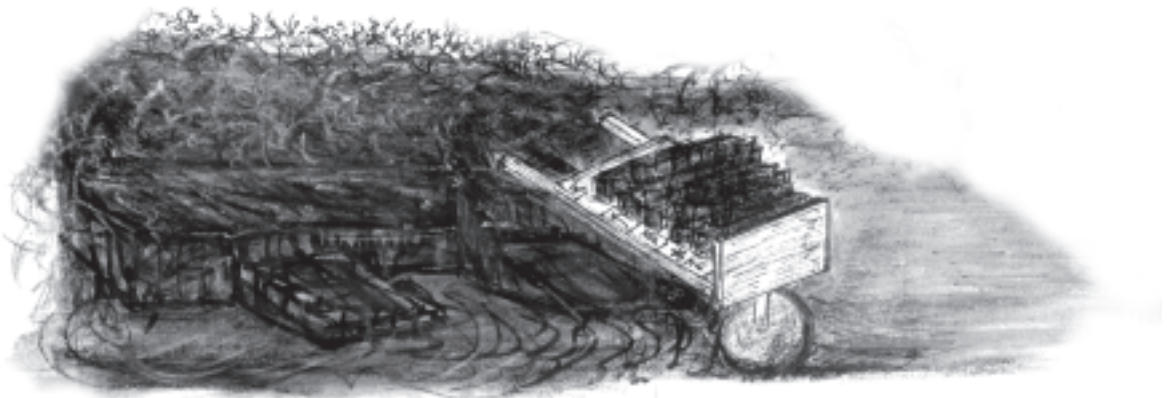
I need an elsewhere.

I chuck a crust to the birds at my feet
and turn to the departure timetable.

From the train I might see
the skinny woman I once saw
stroking a horse
near the tracks in Kildare,
or

the gang of hardy lads in shirt sleeves
ambling down the platform
in a deluge of dust in Roscommon.

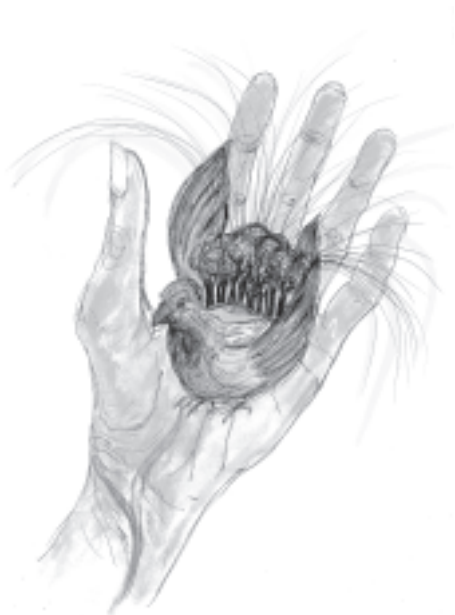
If I were asked to construct a philosophy,
I'd draw on swamps, turf-barrows
or things that poke out, flow or grow.







5 The light above
Cill Aodáin
arches like a sparrow
in the hollow
of a special hand.








6 There's enough life in me for nine
of my own funerals. My nose
in a book will soothe morbid scars.
Let the unfinished come as it will.
There are tufts of delight in the
dark muddle of November.
I often think of an old woman
whipping past stacks of turf
in her ass and cart on pension day.
She would paint her dead bard's song
Friday after Friday
in the colours of the roadside.







7 There are no great lines in this for me,
except that
I am made in the image and flesh
of Cill Aodáin
— it is my birthplace,

and even if some of my best times,
here,
have been spent elsewhere, I have
cherished strolling the banks
of the unreal
hand in hand with an old blind bard.

*Come with me and I will show you
a landscape in my blurred vision,
he would say.*





8

Clean the bank
into the *seanpholl*
sharpen the *sleán*
cut the turf
tea in the bog

breast turf
black turf
brown turf
white turf
tea in the bog

spread the turf
turn the turf
foot the turf
clamp the turf
tea in the bog

turn out the turf
draw the turf home
throw in the turf
stack the turf
teatime

bring in a few sods
say the rosary
pray for souls departed
rake the fire
bedtime

take out the ashes
stoke the fire
day in day out
in the cycle of turf

week in week out
in the cycle of turf

year in year out
in the cycle of turf

through the ages
in the cycle of turf

ashes to ashes
in the cycle of turf

in the cycle of fire
in the cycle of life.





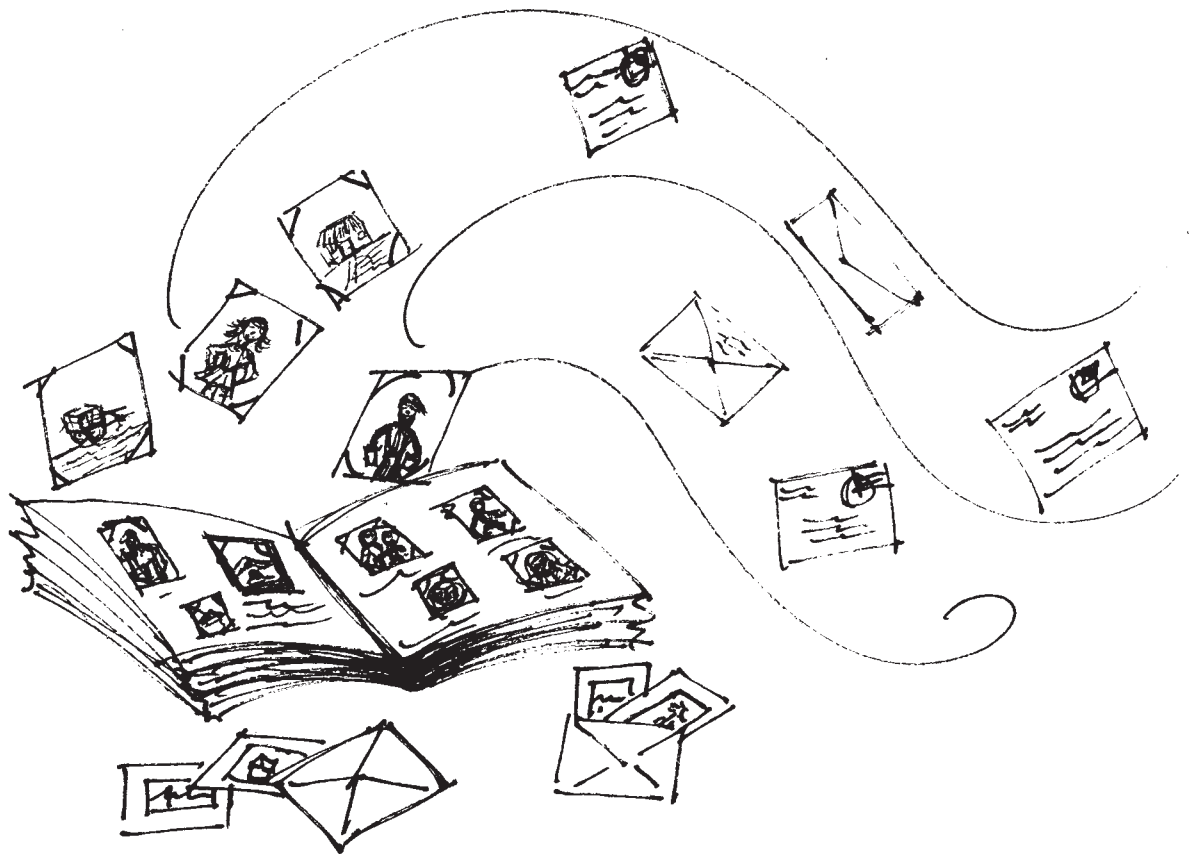
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In years, seasons, months and days, gratuitous,

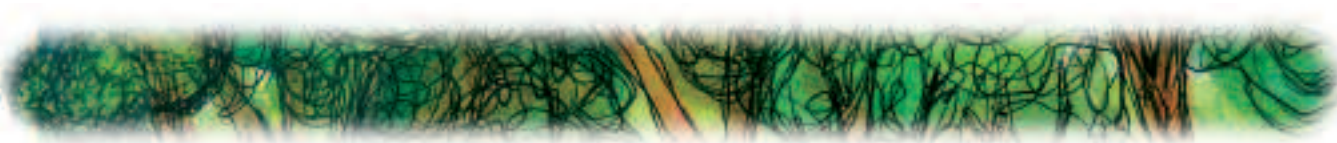
fathers hoped their sons would be strapping boys,
mothers hoped their daughters would be good girls.

Boys and girls hoped they would be gathered up
and wrapped in blankets woven in tough wind.

In old photos you can see that hope in their eyes.





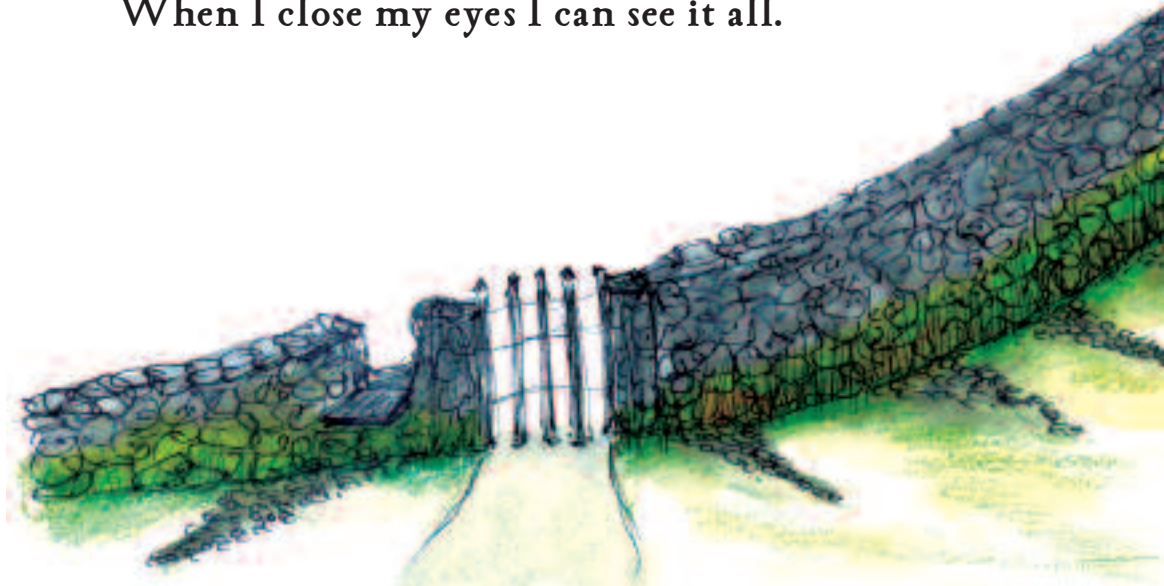


10 The ancestors of birds, deer and fish
reigned in a kingdom of bogland,
fanfares-of-woodland and swamps
— a restless landscape
like a mad installation
and a young player queen at play.

The churchyard by the Pollagh river
was home to Franciscans, until
Cromwell re-chartered their history.

Starlings flocked to the trees
behind *Lios Ard* as if
being part of a noisy group made sense.

When I close my eyes I can see it all.







1 1

I can see cows in dribs and drabs
along the bog road.

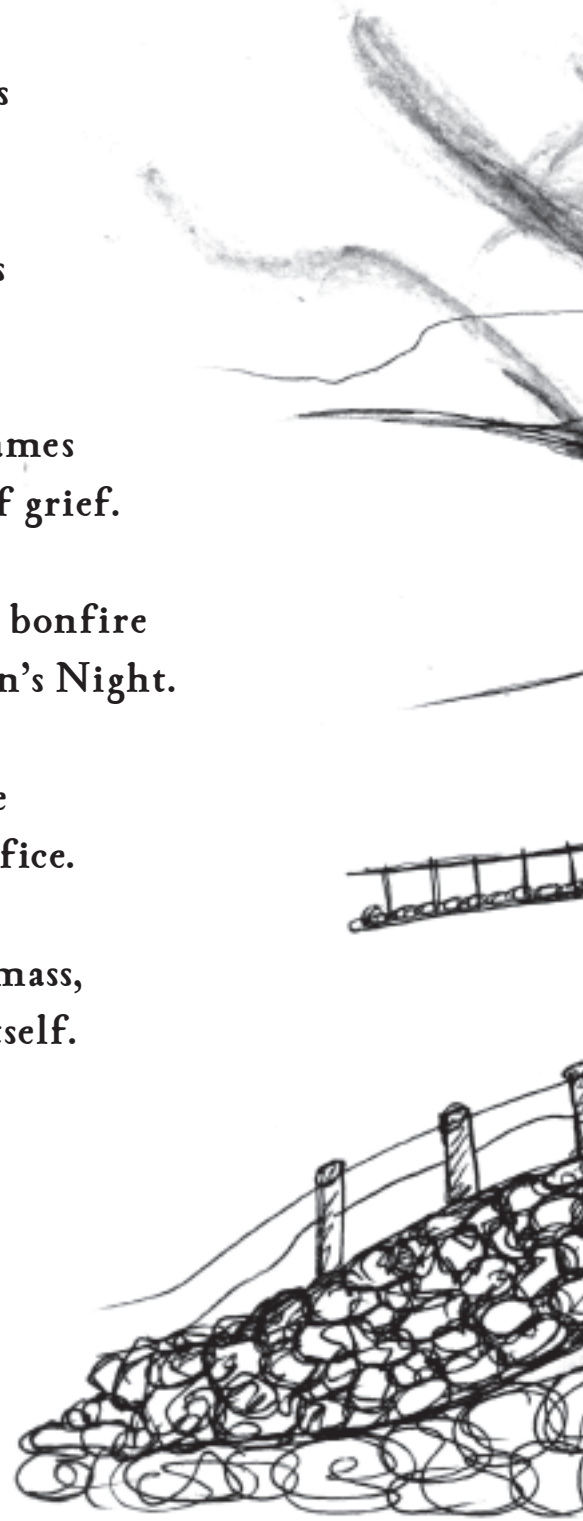
I can see donkeys on their knees
doing the work of horses.

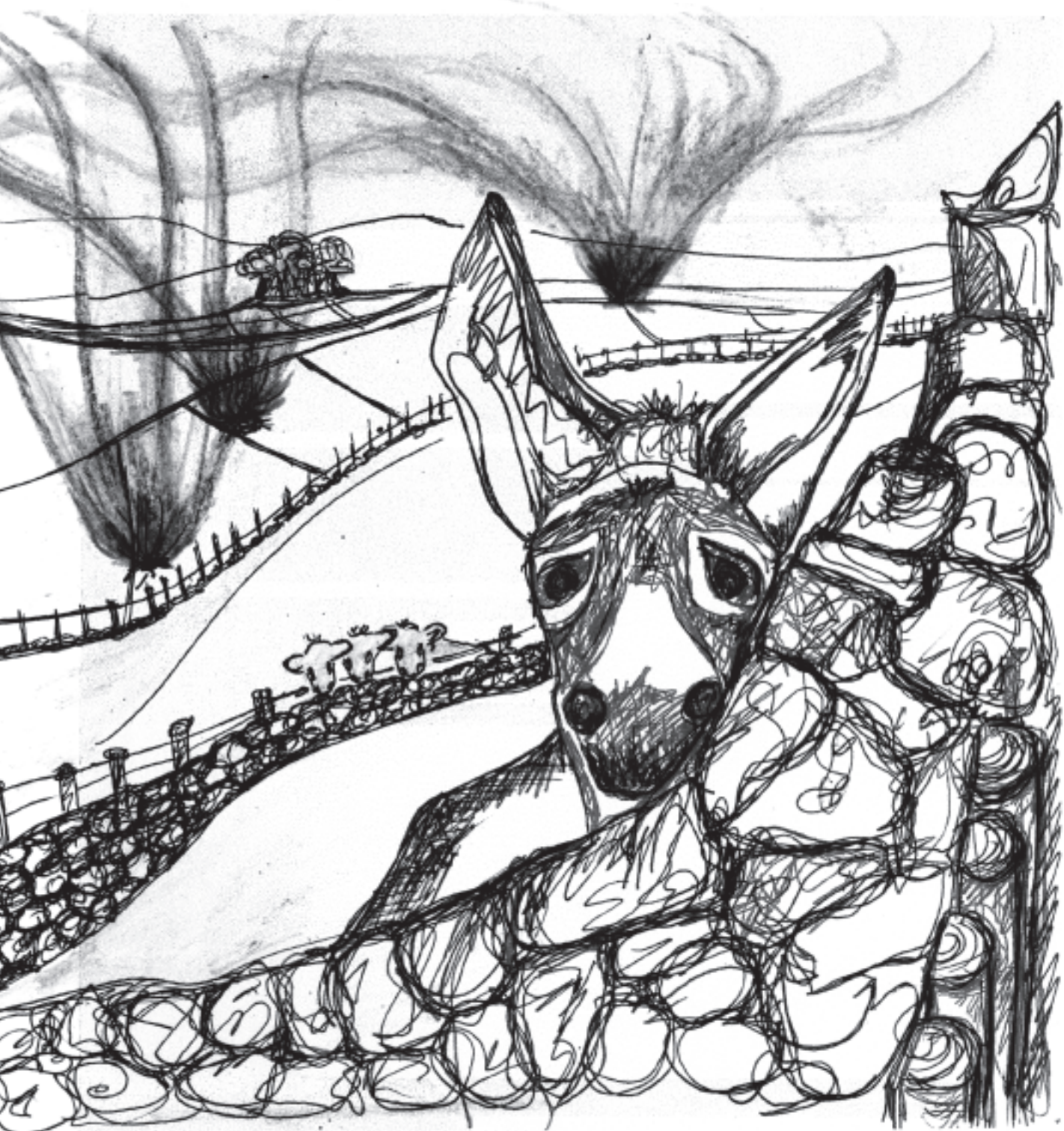
I can see fields that had Irish names
like colours cloaked in a state of grief.

I can see wet and dry turf and a bonfire
that rarely got going on St. John's Night.

I can see the grief of being alone
and the sad incense of self-sacrifice.

I can see football after Sunday mass,
until evening took the ball to itself.



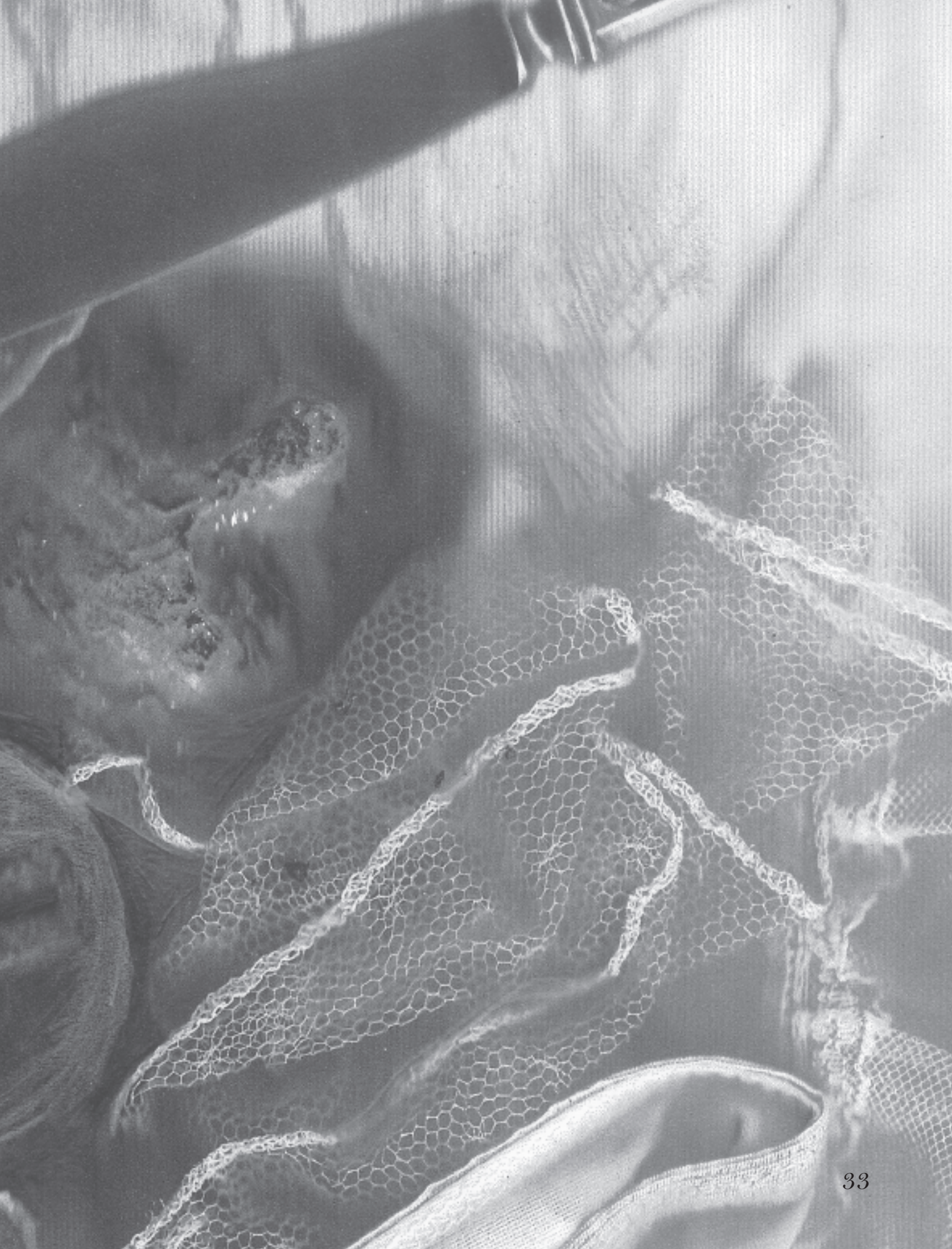




12

Nobody knew some houses in Cill Aodáin
for
they were bolted outside and empty within.

And rumour had it nobody knew one man at all
for
he wore lingerie when stealing chickens after dark.





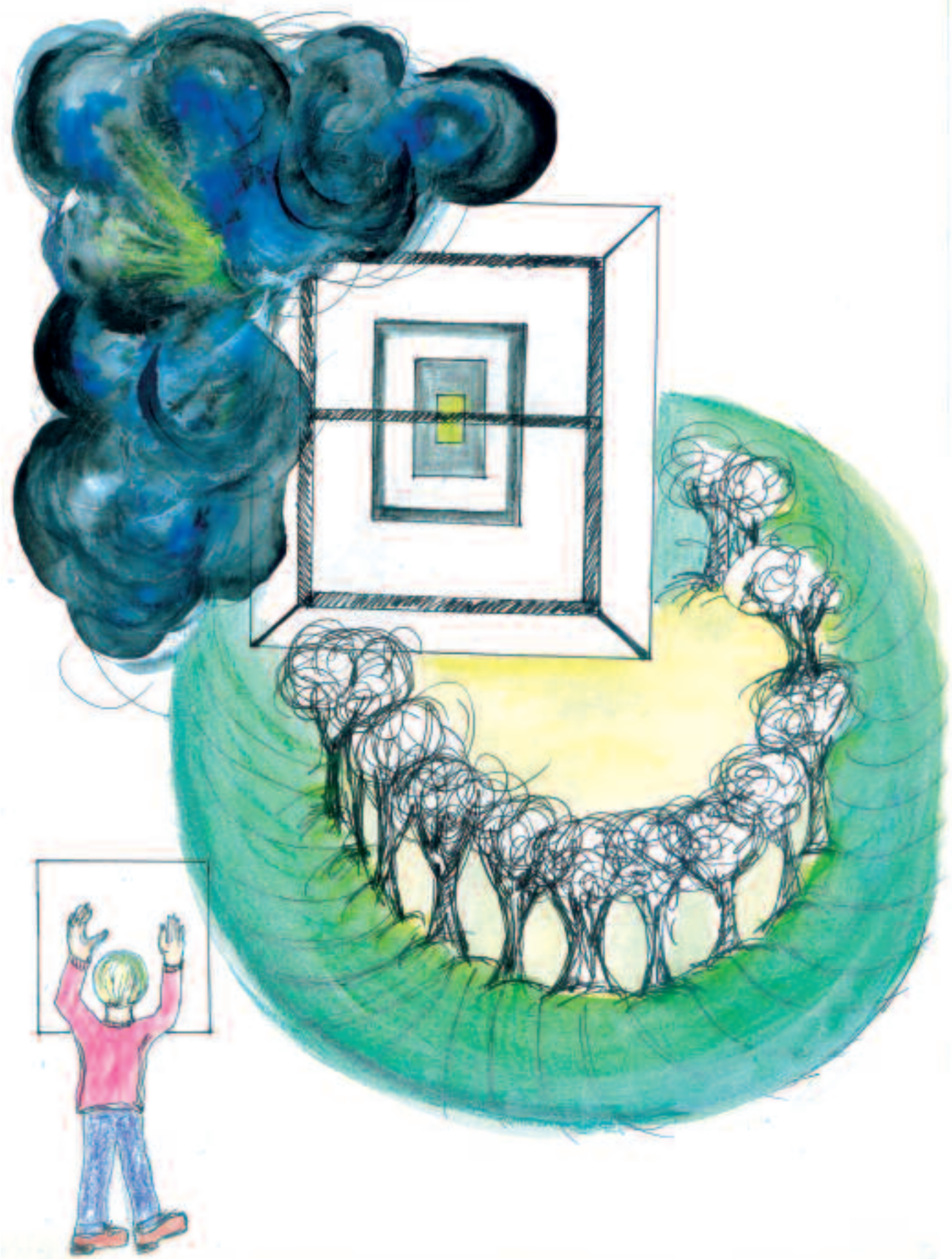
13

Forts, songs, fairytales and the name,
Anthony Raftery,
helped to hold us together.

As a child I kept my face to the pane
looking into room after empty room;
into an endless void with only an elsewhere,

and even when I closed my eyes,
there was no day taking shape without
the dark cloud of a godhead to cap it.

I raise a glass to the length and breadth of it.





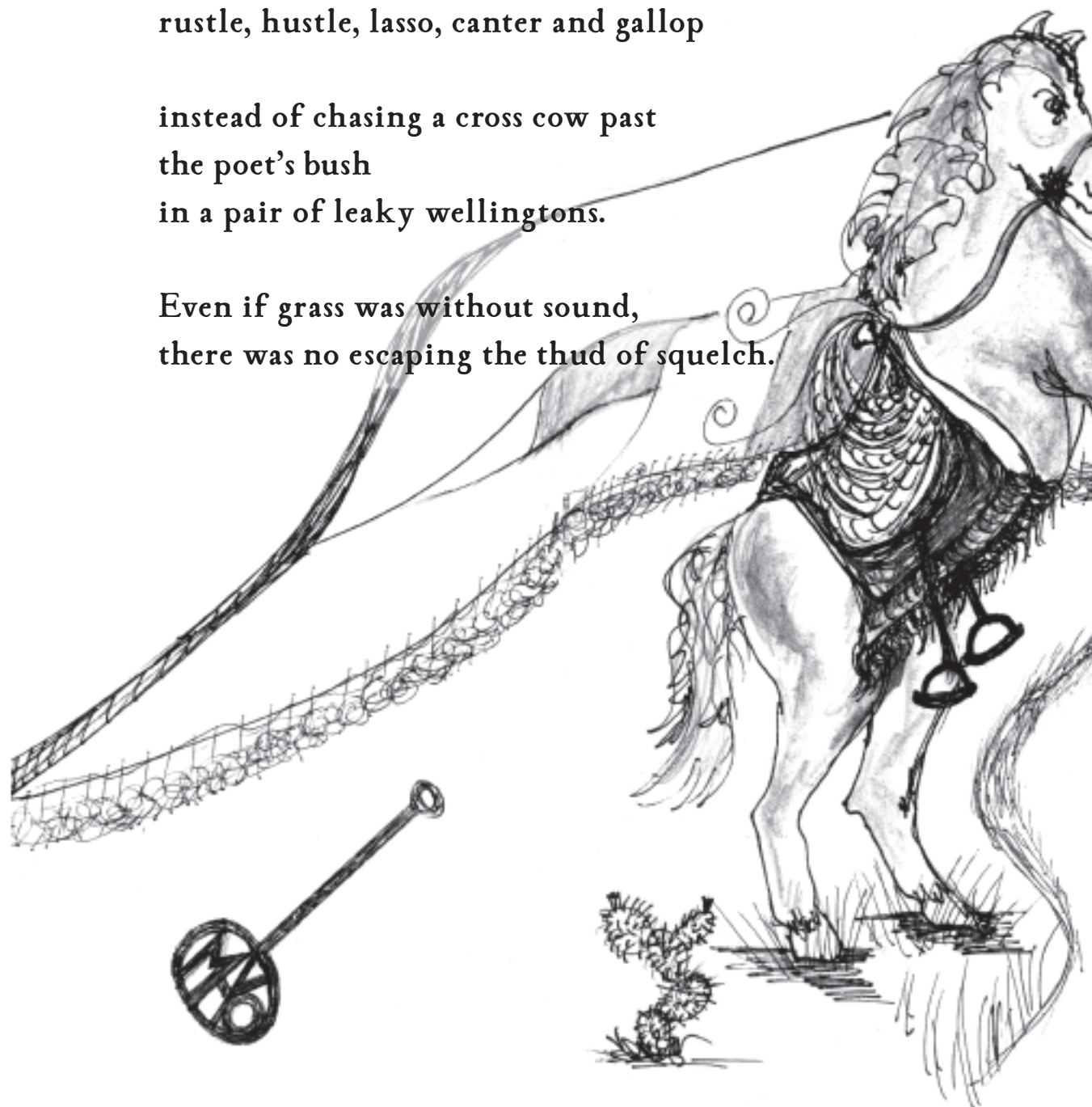
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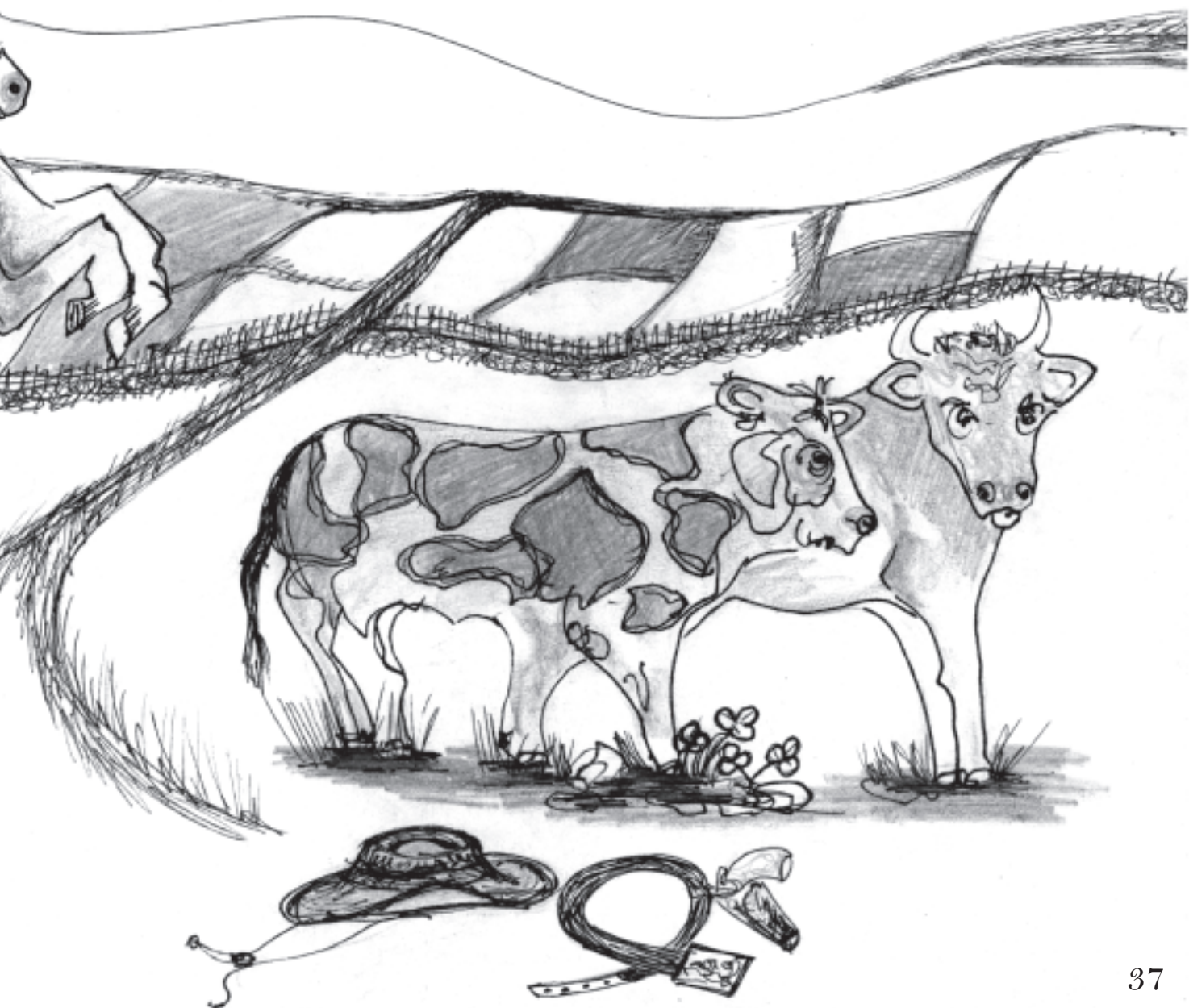
I'd cycle the three miles to the library
in Kiltimagh

— Zane Grey was my saviour:
I could round up cattle on horseback,
rustle, hustle, lasso, canter and gallop

instead of chasing a cross cow past
the poet's bush
in a pair of leaky wellingtons.

Even if grass was without sound,
there was no escaping the thud of squelch.







15

According to Raftery, Cill Aodáin
was the place where everything grew.

Yes, we did have some honeysuckle,
berries by the bucket, primroses,
cowslips to wallow in, buttercups, daisies,

nettles, poison-chalices and holdings
divided into lots of thirteen acres.

The plough hung over fields
the way stars hung from the wintry sky.

Most real work was done by spade,
scythe, sledgehammer and children.
Whitewashed walls kept the best side out.





16

Men were real men of sin
and wrinkles
in and out of the rain
in and out of the sun
in and out of the bog
in and out of season
in and out of boat trains
in and out of alien labour
in and out
over and back
in and out
over and back
in out
back and over
for a decade or two
in out of work
home for good
in the end.







17

When the boy was a boy
he had dreamt

of lanes and wild flowers
he had dreamt

of heifers in a top field
he had dreamt

of words like Rio Grande
beauty queen

racehorse past the post
he had stood by a river

and looked across
at home on the other side

dreaming of his children
and he looked down

at his own footwear
took a donkey-jacket

from a landlady's backdoor peg
and set out for a building site

with tears in his eyes.



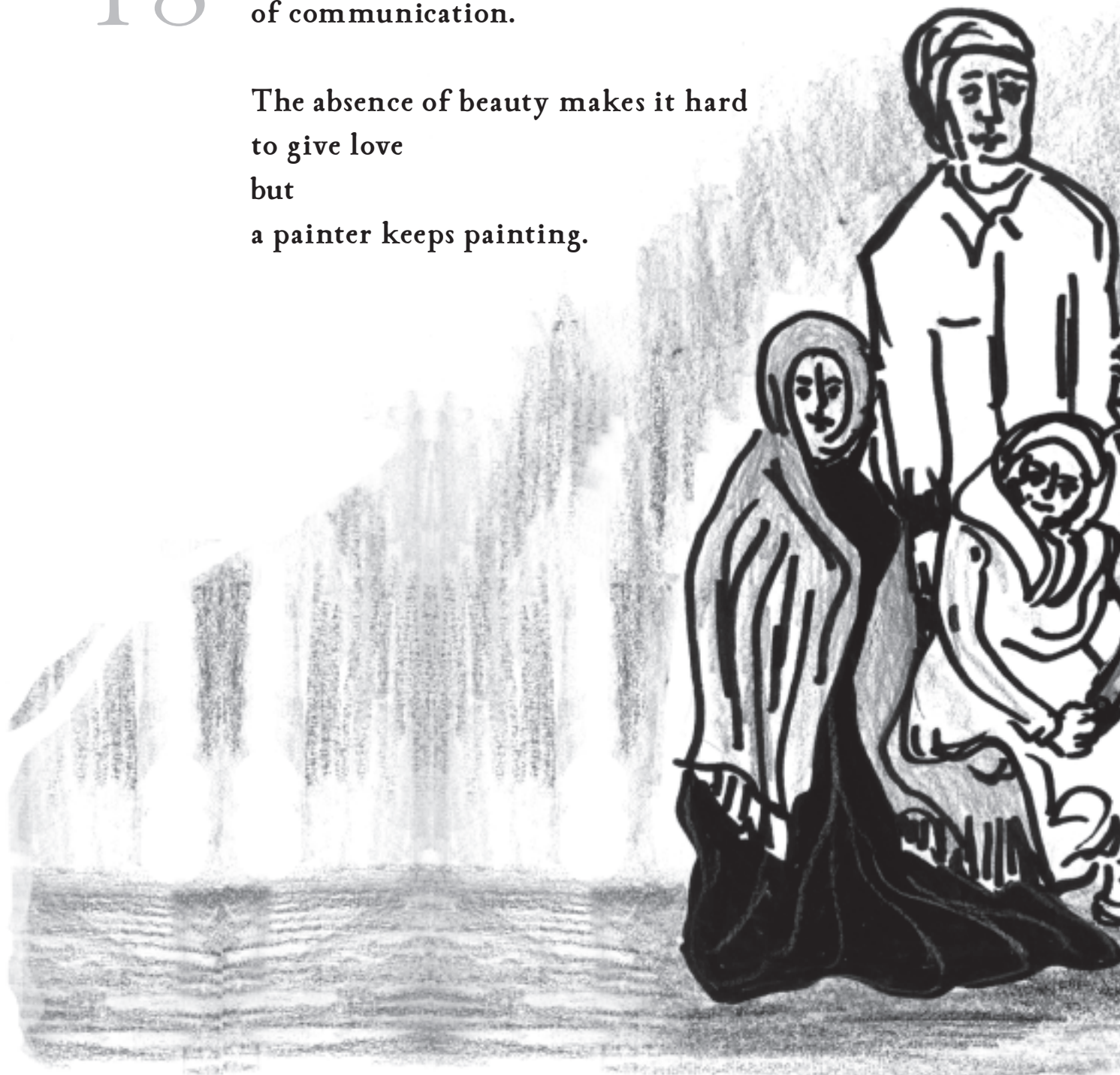




18

Silence was the usual form
of communication.

The absence of beauty makes it hard
to give love
but
a painter keeps painting.







19 Women were real women of sin
and wrinkles
in and out of the rain
in and out of the sun
in and out of the bog
in and out of season
in and out of the kitchen
in and out of maternity
in and out
up and down
in and out
up and down
in out
down and up
to the river
in out of a floral dress
at home as ever
in the end.





20

When the girl was a girl
she had dreamt

of streets where there was no grass
she had dreamt

of a parasol by the beach
she had dreamt

of words like Edwardian
leading lady

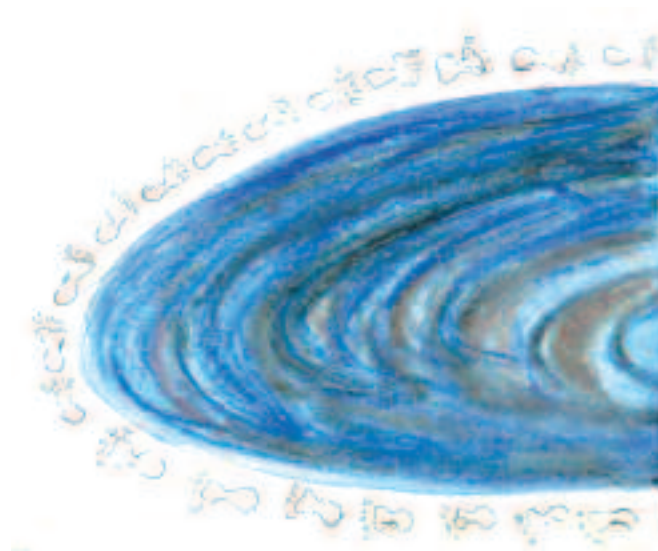
movement of tiny feet
she stood at the river

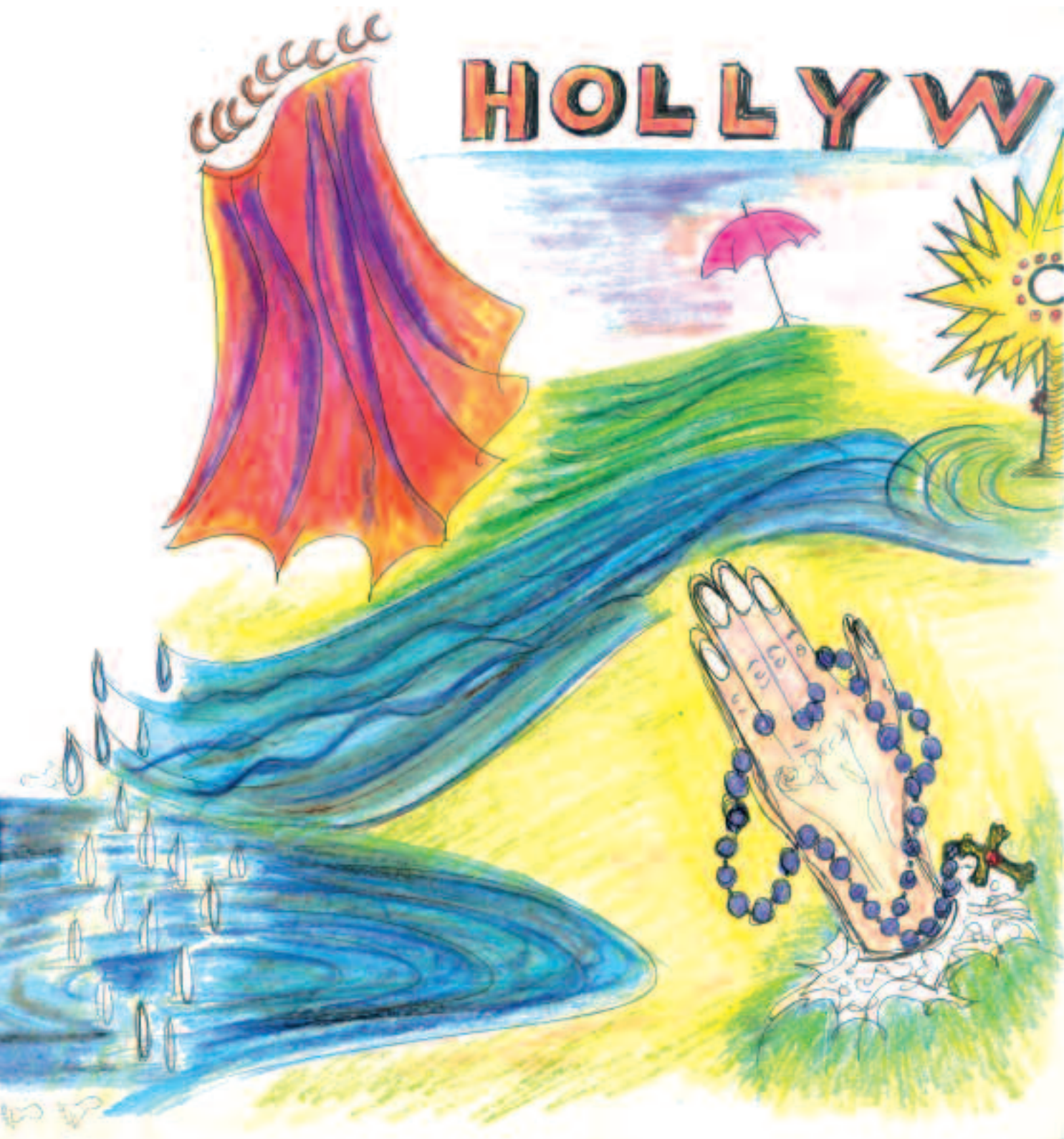
and looked across
at Hollywood on the other side

dreaming of drapes
and she looked down

at her own footwear
took her raincoat

from the backdoor peg
and walked to Benediction
with tears in her eyes.







21

The Big House poked its head
through stately trees.

Lotty, Emily and Dermot MacManus
stoked an old piano,
gave voice to a fairy kingdom
and placed whitethorn under protection
in deserted drawing rooms.

*Up the airy mountain
Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a hunting
For fear of little men.*

This was the old heart; the mother
in whose presence children rarely spoke.

Men touched their caps and women
kept their eyes to themselves
and were decent at the scullery door.







22

O Mother in ash
tell me the truth
sing me a song
tell me a story
and then I go to bed.

O Mother in thorn
tell me the truth
I am spinning
I am dizzy spinning
the ache in my head
is driving me home.

O Mother in oak
my home is as real
as a mirage —
give me something solid.







23

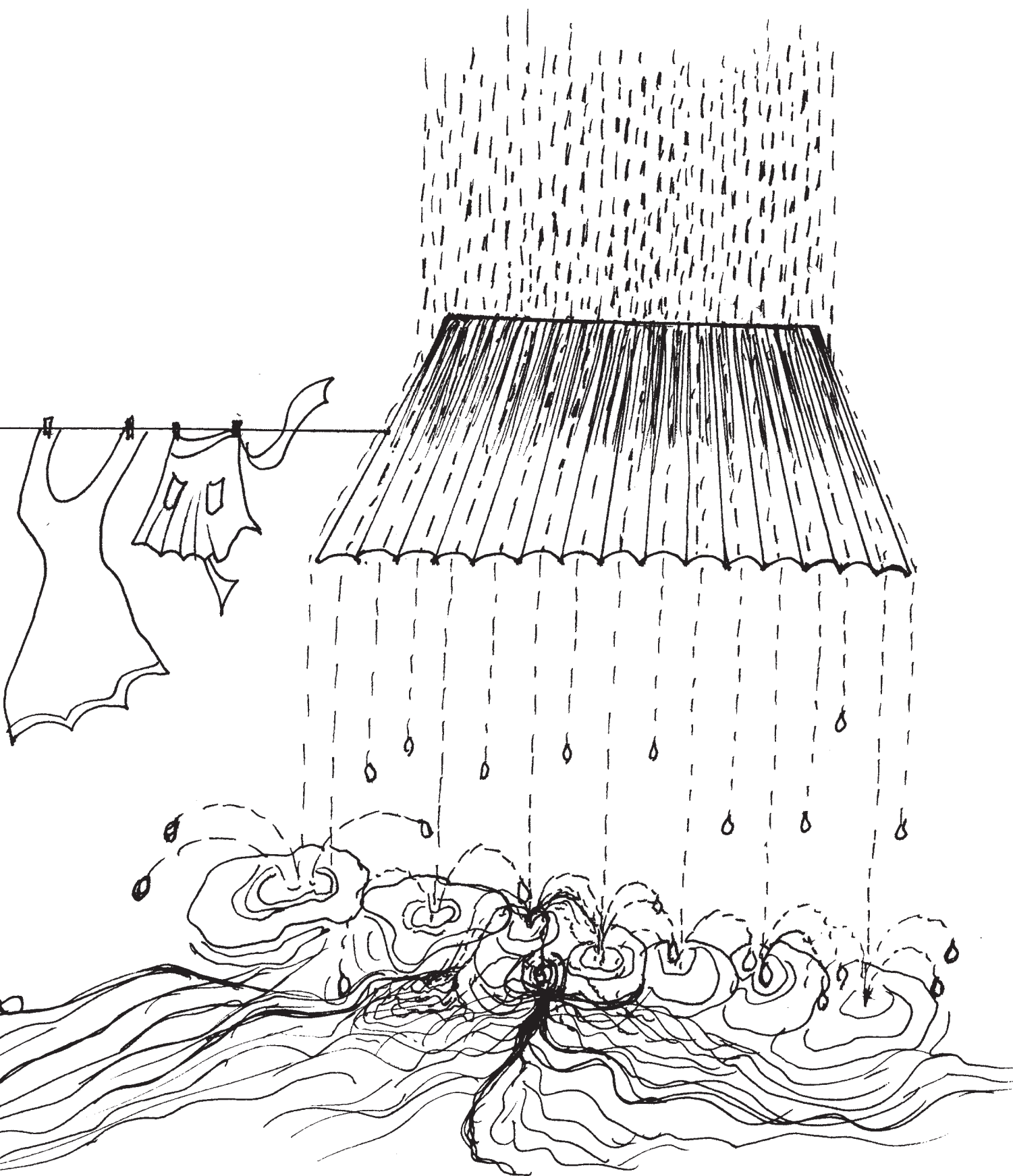
This is no time for social comment.
This is no time to begin flying lessons.
The roofs are shining between showers.

These people were part of our history,
as we were part of theirs
— we had little in common.

Their uniforms still hang, clutching at
cold memories in the fading twilight.

Rain recomposing itself in patter and drip
is a constant.







24

The blind poet of infinite curses
took his warm life into wind and rain.
His lifeless eyes held on to longing and
smells:

*Dúl siar ar m'aistear
le solas mo chroí.*

Where rivers jaunt along, join up and
flow into different names, there are steps
to be remembered:

be nice to me in the morning
be nice to me, be nice to me,
be nice to me in the evening
and then I'll go to bed.

*Fann agus tuirseach
go deireadh mo shli.*





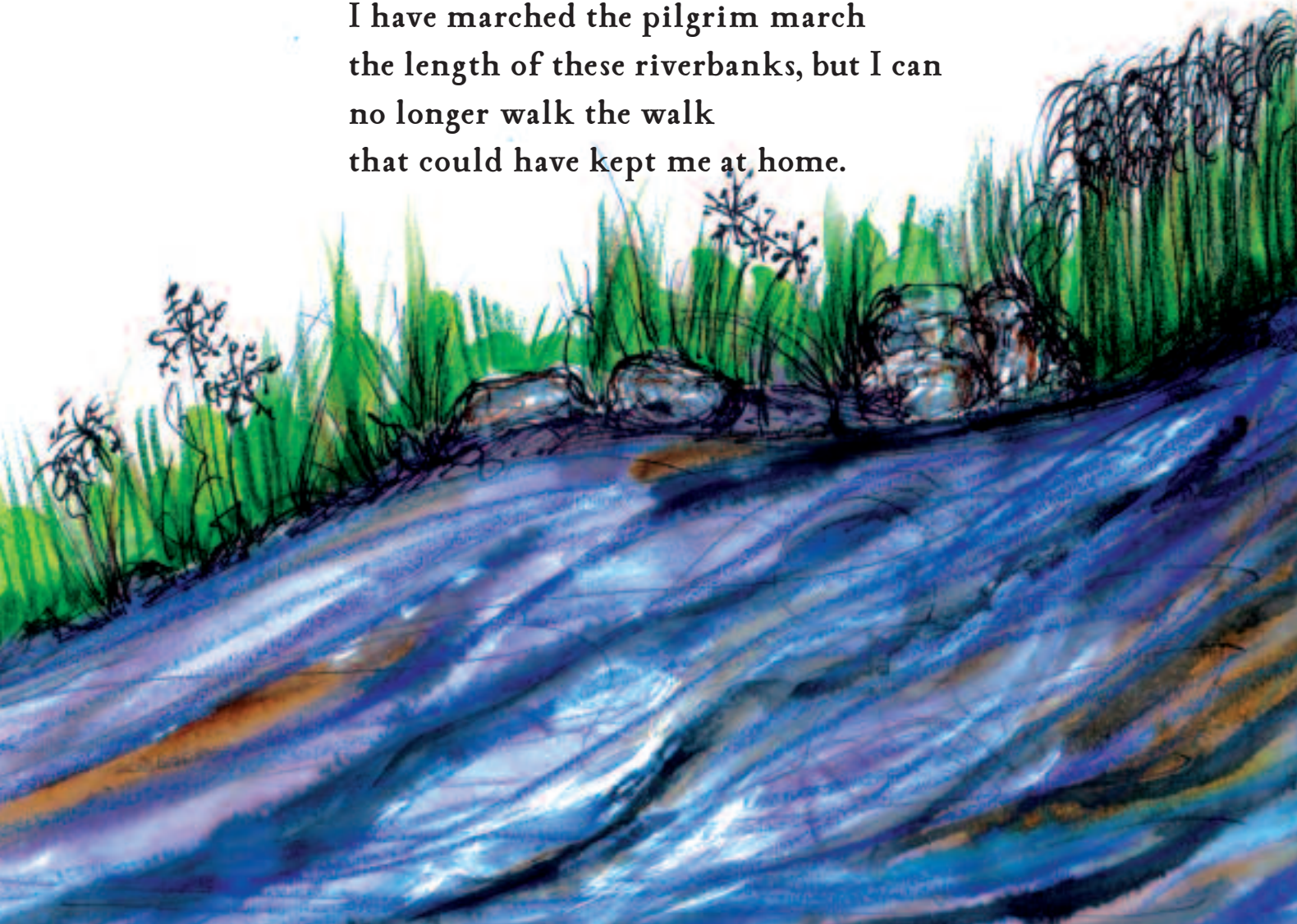
25

From these banks I can sing conversations
inside me, without being heard by those
scurrying past on their way to the stock exchange.

Rivers are their own architects, always
on the move like children in soft clothes.

I can be a stranger dipping into currents,
one-toe-at-a-time, until the rhythm of strokes
allows me beyond the plea of caution.

I have marched the pilgrim march
the length of these riverbanks, but I can
no longer walk the walk
that could have kept me at home.







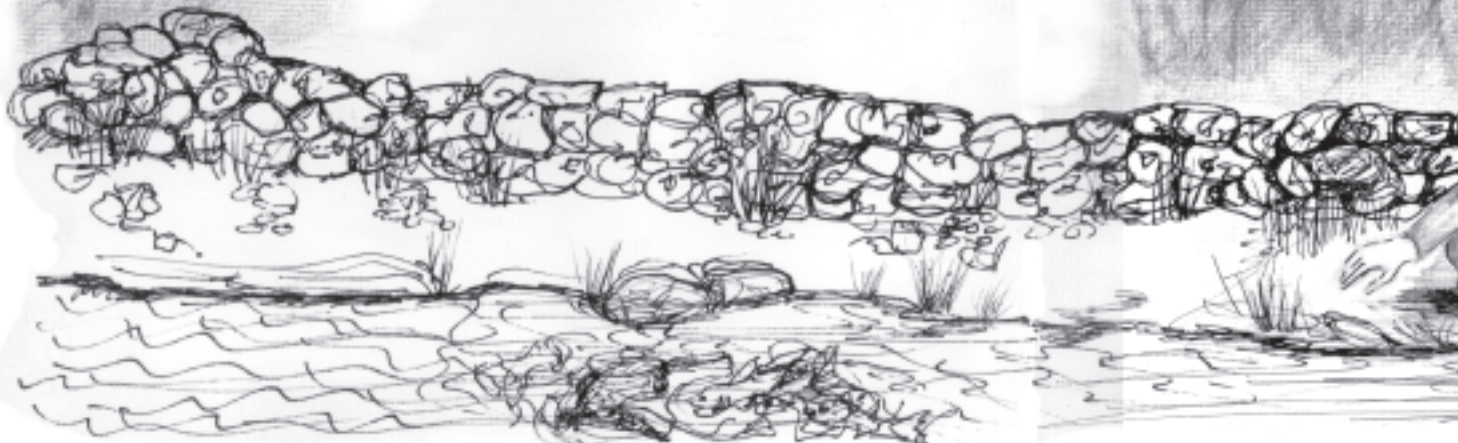
26

In days gone by, I had fathers and
fear of testaments as my guide. Now
I have the thrust of fish, the flight of
a lone heron and

— just sometimes,
the faint whisper of the old monks
who had camped and built beehives.

I am my own celebrant
in communion with the riverbank and river.
Cattle drink as they've always drunk.

Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.
Devils, demons, devils. I dip in and
look to the past drying up in the breeze.







27

The time has come when I can stand
beside Raftery's stone and bush; beside
the gravestone of
my great-grandfather, Thady Conlon,
and reel in a chunk of my own story.

History has left its mark: loud calls
from abroad gave hope, but they
left lone men and women behind
to dream
of grass that might come up greener.

I remember seeing an elderly man
weeping into a filthy Pollard bag
at the wheel of his abandoned tractor
in a leafy, secluded lane one Sunday.

His neighbours would have been at Mass.





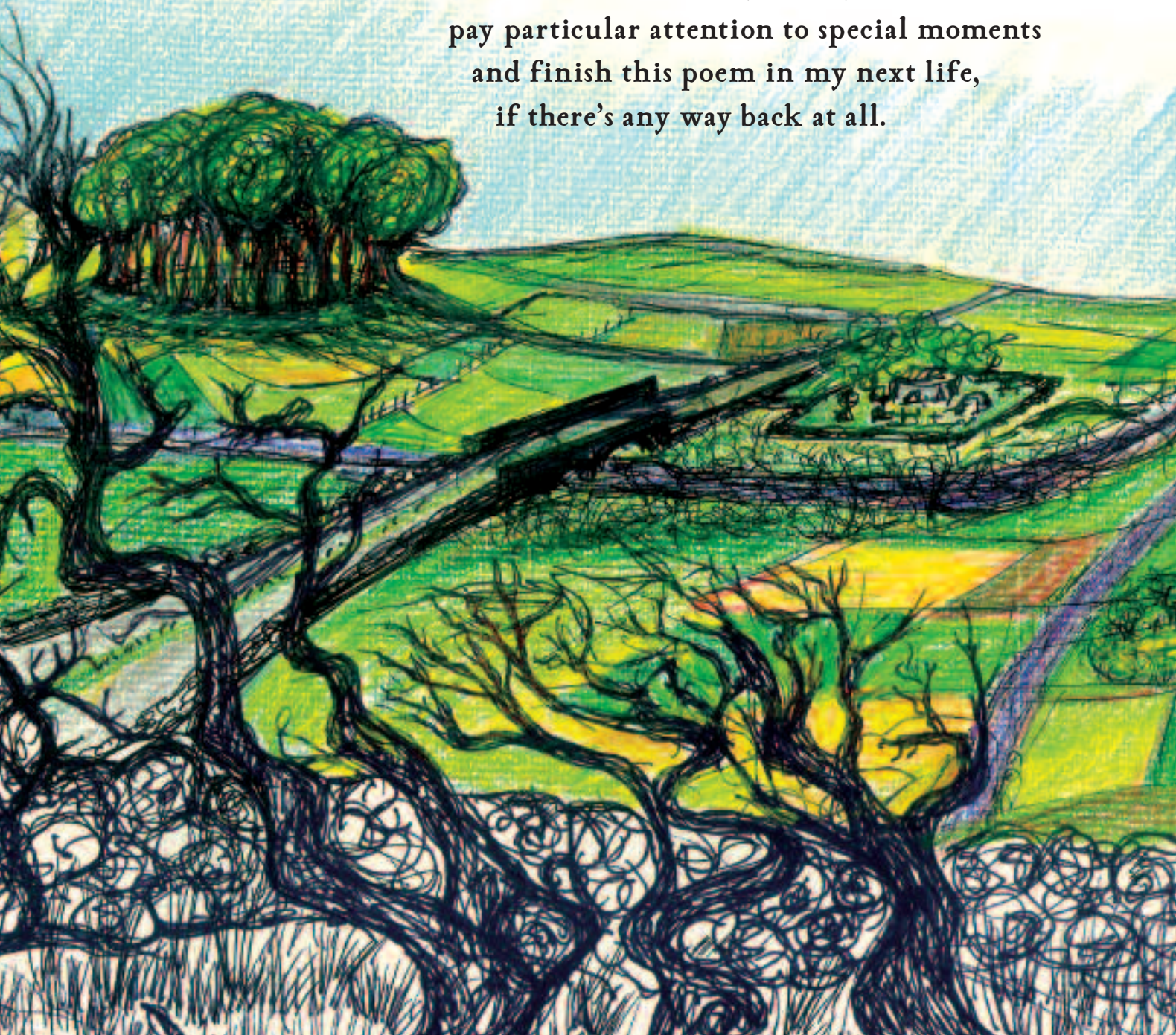


28



Drapes rise and fall on new time.
Doors open and close.
Lovers lie here and there. Cold
awaits death in black and brown clay.

In the meantime I'll eat, drink,
pay particular attention to special moments
and finish this poem in my next life,
if there's any way back at all.



A Few Thoughts

The longer I live, the more I become conscious of a veil, fine as silk, between the so-called real world and the semi-conscious world of the imagination. It's a hazy world. Our lives of dreams, imaginings and creativity lurk in there behind the veil, coaxing, urging and calling out for expression. The further I moved away from Cill Aodáin, the more the haze lifted and the more clearly I could see a *really real* world behind the veil — and the louder the call to commit my thoughts to paper became.

I showed some of the poems I had written to Sally McKenna and, within a few strokes of her brush, the figures began to move about in a different medium. It was an exhilarating moment. The project began to freewheel from then on, embroiling itself in this new community unfolding before my eyes. There were no further constrictions.

It has been said that, as an adult, you can never, fully, return to the home where you were born and grew up, nor can you ever, truly, leave that home. This is probably an aspect of the push-and-tug we refer to when we talk about the human condition and of our ongoing struggle to find a quieter, more balanced place between high and low, far and near or right and wrong.

We are on a road, be it real or symbolic. Once we have set out we can never again find the exact footprint to step neatly back into. Our foot never fits again. Our first steps get covered over by fog and dust. There is nothing for it, but to continue piecing together special moments that allow themselves to be pieced.

Childhood experiences in the fields, the bog, fishing, playing football after the hay was in, or racing across meadows to school, have disappeared forever into my imagination. Just recently I went up to The High Fort (*Lios Árd*)

to see if I could find my name on the bark of old beech trees — in vain. My name was buried and had become entangled in the life of the tree. Perhaps I had never written it. It could have been my desire to leave a mark. The great philosopher, Berkley, might have suggested it could only have been there as long as I was in a position to perceive it. But, thankfully, I am free to create, or not create.

My Uncle, Tim, would take us for walks *up the hill*, down by Raftery's stone, or up to The High Fort. He told us stories of the *little people* who had given Raftery his gift of poetry; he told us about our great-grandfather, Thady Conlon, a hedge-school teacher, who had translated the poem Cill Aodáin and passed it on to Dr. Douglas Hyde. Water had its own sound in winter and poaching salmon was *burning the river*, my uncle used to say.

I talked to a Dutch novelist at the Writers Festival in Bali a few years ago. Most of her writing had to do with travel, in one way or another, but she didn't own a camera and never took a photo. I asked her why and she said that, for her, memory and imagination kept experiences more real and true to life.

When I cycle back the road today, it is no longer the road I knew. Water hens, bats and starlings have left or been driven away by forces beyond them. Nobody drives cows to and from fields morning and evening, and there's hardly any evidence that men, women and children cut and saved turf — such is the price or reward of progress.

These poems have been with me for my lifetime and now they are free to make their own way. They have been enriched by Sally McKenna's art. I wish them well. May they have a long and fruitful journey.

Terry McDonagh



Biography and Publications:

Terry McDonagh (www.terry-mcdonagh.com), poet and dramatist, lived in Hamburg for more than twenty years. He taught English at the University of Hamburg, and was Drama Director at the International School for sixteen years. He now shares his time between his native Mayo and Hamburg.

He has been writer-in-residence in many countries in Europe – also in Asia and Australia. In addition to his books, his work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies worldwide.

Poetry:

- *The Road Out* – Olaf Hille Verlag, Hamburg, 1993.
- *A World without Stone* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg, 1998.
- *A Song for Joanna* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg, 2002.
- *Boxes* – children's poetry – Blaupause Books, Hamburg, 2006.
- Included in: *Something Beginning with P* – children's poetry – O'Brien Press, Dublin, 2004.
- Included in: *Present Tense* (anthology of Mayo writers) – Mayo Co. Council, 2007.

Poetry in Translation:

- *Kiltimagh* – (into German) Blaupause Books, Hamburg. Translated by Mirko Bonné (grant aided by Ireland Literature Exchange) 2001.
- *Tiada Tempat di Rawa* – (into Indonesian), Indonesia Tera, Magelang, Indonesia. Translated by Sapardi Djoko Damono, and the late, Dami N. Toda. (grant-aided by Ireland Literature Exchange) 2004.

Prose:

- *Elbe Letters go West/Briefe von der Elbe* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg, 1999.
- *One Summer in Ireland* – a novel for young people – Ernst Klett Verlag, Stuttgart, 2002.
- Included in: *Weihnachtsgeschichten am Kamin – Christmas Stories by the Fireside* – Rowohlt Verlag, Reinbek (*A Christmas story set in Kiltimagh*). Translated by author, Rainer Kuehn. Annually since 1997.

Drama:

- *I Wanted to Bring You Flowers/Ich kann das alles erklären* – Fischer Verlag, Aachen, 1991.

Word & Music:

- With piper, Diarmaid Moynihan, he completes poet/piper duo, Raithneach.
- Twelve of his poems have been put to music by Hamburg composer, Eberhard Reichel.

Thoughts on Cill Aodáin & Nowhere Else

This is a joining of word and image from the land of Cill Aodáin, in County Mayo, Ireland. Terry McDonagh's poems have changed my experience of the landscape. The green hills rising above the Mill on the Glone River, where I have my studio, will never be the same to me or to anyone who reads this book.

When I first read the poems, fleeting pictures began to emerge. *I was wrapped in blankets woven in tough wind.* The phrases danced along the stone walls. *Things that poke out flow or grow,* stuck in my mind like a stubborn bramble and I thought, yes I can do this.

I trusted that my experience of Cill Aodáin as an ancient place, *before Eve listened to the snake,* would reveal itself. The land makes art in the twisted hawthorne and the strangling ivy; I could connect with that. There is a struggle in it and the words that I was drawn to. The stone hearth where Antony Raftery was born — it's still there by his thorn bush.

Local legend has it that the fairy folk from the High Fort, on the cover, are the source of Raftery's poetic gift. No one walks by the High Fort — *Lios Ard* — without giving it a nod. It is always a source of joy to me. *Forts, songs, fairytales and the name Antony Raftery, helped to hold us together.* They still do.

When I first came to Mayo in 1993, it was at the invitation of our parish priest in Arizona, who had a cottage near Cill Aodáin, where his mother was born. Father John Cunningham said this is the *real Ireland*, so we came. Since then, land here has held a special quality for me. Our Irish heritage was always talked about in the United States where I was born. We raised the Irish flag and searched our family trees and found names to which we could pin our history.

Walking the roads that Raftery walked, looking out over fields and talking to neighbors, left me with a vestige of connection.

In this volume Terry McDonagh has a journey he shares. This is his birthplace which he left only to return to again and again. I, too, came home to this place but as a stranger. Many of the poems bring us to meet Terry, the poet, as a child. I called on my early drawing style to convey that sense of continuity between the adult and the child artist. I remembered the drawings of a little city girl longing for a home amidst cows, flowers and farms.

Every artist relies on their eyes to interpret light and shadow. The poet's words give a new dimension to *seeing* the landscape. While drawing the crosses of Cill Aodáin my own experience of climbing the cemetery wall and going down to the Pollagh River, meshed with his. Standing on the bank, shared by the local



"Things that Poke Out Flow and Grow"
Mixed media sculpture by Sally McKenna (2' x 2')

cows, I was also, *my own celebrant in communion with the riverbank and river*. I was elevated out of the mud to the boundary of light and dark which is the essence of the Pollagh. I was glad to leave the muck.

In this ancient land of underground tunnels running to the same source, the paths of poet and artist crossed. We have both had our faces pressed to the pane of glass. It is hoped that the joining of words and pictures traveling

from home and back again will give the reader enjoyment and an insight into their own journey as they read this book.

Sally McKenna



Biography and Work

Sally McKenna's lifelong love of the arts has led her to create commissions in sculpture and painting around the world. After completing a university art degree, while still a young mother, in 1976, she built her first studio in a garage attached to the family home in Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A.

Dividing her time between child rearing, art teaching and sculpting she developed a unique style characterized by a mixed media approach that allowed her to experiment with many techniques.

She is an international artist with commissioned sculptures sited in the United States, Canada, and Ireland. Stonehenge Solstice, a multi media sculpture was commissioned for the Olympic games in 1980. Since then, her largest sculptures travel around the world on the Sun and Dawn Princess cruise ships, and she has created wall sculpture for city council offices in Phoenix, Tempe and Glendale, Arizona.

Several hospitals in the United States include Sally's work in their permanent collections: St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix and JFK Memorial Hospital in Edison, New Jersey. Corporate offices in the American cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, Denver, Houston, Scottsdale, Phoenix, Tucson, Omaha, Cincinnati and Minneapolis include, in their art collections, interpretations of Sally's view of the world in metals and mixed media fibres.

In Ireland, her heritage sculptures for Kiltimagh: *The Way Home*, *Western Day* and *I'll Send You the Fare* are part of an ongoing sculptural story on the Main Street. *Solar Orb*, created for Ballindine National School, catches and frames the sun on the winter solstice. A sculptural Tree of Life created from an eighteen-foot oak was completed under the auspices of the Columban Missionary Awareness Centre in Dalgan Park, County Meath: titled *Sun Under Tara*. It is located amidst a circle of trees and is the centre of a meditation space. She is currently creating a series of sculptures for St Peter's National School, Snugboro, Castlebar, using the children's drawings of the surrounding countryside as a theme.

This twelve-year personal journey, begun in 1992 with her return to Ireland, was shown in a one-woman show of paintings, drawings and sculpture in July of 2004 in the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre in Dublin. More recent work has been shown in Castlebar Hospital in 2005.

From her first studio in a garage in Arizona she is now creating her painting and sculpture looking out at the Irish countryside above the Glone River. The renovation of the 1912 Glone Mill near Cill Aodáin is a dream that encompasses her love of her Irish American heritage and her wish to be close to nature and create from it as a continual source of inspiration.

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