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No. : TRUEFLOW1 p1750318-0000800008

Poems on the Underground: A New Edition

Edited by Gerard Benson, Judith Chernaik
and Cicely Herbert

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the programme was launched in 1986.
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Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, tr. Paul Muldoon, from
Pharaoh’s Daughter (Gallery Press 1990)

Design by: The Creative Practice
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Produced by Poems on the Underground
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Community Interest Company

THE RESCUE

In drifts of sleep I came upon you
Buried to your waist in snow.
You reached your arms out: I came to
Like water in a dream of thaw.

SEAMUS HEANEY

NOT WEEDING

Nettle, bramble, shepherd’s purse –
refugees from the building site
that was once the back field,

my former sworn enemies
these emissaries of the wild
now cherished guests.

PAULA MEEHAN

THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

I place my hope on the water
in this little boat
of the language, the way a body might put
an infant

in a basket of intertwined
iris leaves,
its underside proofed
with bitumen and pitch,

then set the whole thing down amidst
the sedge
and bulrushes by the edge
of a river

only to have it borne hither and thither,
not knowing where it might end up;
in the lap, perhaps,
of some Pharaoh’s daughter.

NUALA NÍ DHOMHNAILL
Translated by Paul Muldoon

‘WHAT IS TRUTH?’

What is truth? says Pilate,
Waits for no answer;
Double your stakes, says the clock
To the ageing dancer;
Double the guard, says Authority,
Treble the bars;
Holes in the sky, says the child
Scanning the stars.

LOUIS MACNEICE

LEGENDS

for Eavan Francis

Tryers of firesides,
twilights. There are no tears in these.

Instead, they begin the world again,
making the mountain ridges blue
and the rivers clear and the hero fearless –

and the outcome always undecided
so the next teller can say *begin* and
again and astonish children.

Our children are our legends.
You are mine. You have my name.
My hair was once like yours.

And the world
is less bitter to me
because you will re-tell the story.

EAVAN BOLAND

Poems on the Underground

celebrating Irish poetry



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Poems on the Underground

celebrating Irish poetry

*I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity,
Come dance with me in Ireland.'*

W.B. Yeats
(after 'Ich am of Irlonde', 14th c)

The wonderful diversity of Irish poetry
from the earliest times to the present day
is an enduring source of delight for
poetry lovers everywhere.

We hope readers who have met these poems
on the Tube will enjoy them as they return to
the printed page.

We are grateful to London Underground,
Arts Council England, the British Council
and Yeats2015 for enabling us to produce
and distribute free copies of this booklet.

The Editors
London, 2015

HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W.B. YEATS

MISE RAIFFEIRÍ AN FILE I AM RAFTERY THE POET

I am Raftery the poet,
full of hope and love;
with eyes without light,
with gentleness without misery.

Going west on my journey
with the light of my heart;
weak and tired
to the end of my road.

I am now,
and my back to a wall,
playing music
to empty pockets.

LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY
(translated from the Irish of
Antoine Ó Raifteirí)

MEMORY OF MY FATHER

Every old man I see
Reminds me of my father
When he had fallen in love with death
One time when sheaves were gathered.

That man I saw in Gardner Street
Stumble on the kerb was one,
He stared at me half-eyed.
I might have been his son.

And I remember the musician
Faltering over his fiddle
In Bayswater, London,
He too set me the riddle.

Every old man I see
In October-coloured weather
Seems to say to me:
'I was once your father.'

PATRICK KAVANAGH

SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

I
That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
– Those dying generations – at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III
O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV
Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

W. B. YEATS