In celebration of All Ireland Poetry Day
October 2011

In celebration of All Ireland Poetry Day 2011, we compiled this short anthology of poetry for distribution through a range of hospitals and day centres in Ireland by asking eight poets to send us poems on the theme of ‘A Moment in Time’. Their poems approach this topic in various ways: some focus on the awareness of a single moment, others on a moment of realisation or choice. We hope that you will enjoy reading and thinking about the imagery and music of these poems, and that the worlds they create will give you your own moments out of time. Please do let us know if you have a favourite poem and your thoughts on the anthology by emailing WHAT@hse.ie.

This is a joint initiative between Arts for Health Partnership Programme, West Cork, Beaumont Hospital Arts Committee, Arts in Health at Cork University Hospital, Galway University Hospitals Arts Trust, Arts Initiative in Mental Health, Sligo, Leitrim, South Donegal, West Cavan, Naas General Hospital Arts Committee, Peamount Health and Social Care, St Luke’s Hospital Arts, Kilkenny, the Waterford Healing Arts Trust and the Twilight Programme, St Patrick’s University Hospital, Dublin. It has been co-ordinated by the Waterford Healing Arts Trust and kindly supported by Poetry Ireland.

Mark Roper
Editor

Grace Wells

I Packed My Bag

and in it I put the things specified on their list: dressing-gown and slippers, toothbrush and paste. I squashed in a decent pillow and my favourite books and snuck in a box of chocolates.

I added the opening bars of Bach’s cello suite in G, and the Vee Valley when the rhododendrons bloom. I put in salt spray crashing off Hook Head, and silence from the top of Sliabh na mBan.

There would be hours of waiting
and sometimes they would take my dignity, so I put in endurance, and a smile for a stranger, and an acre of meadow in soft rain.

Lastly, I packed water bottled at St Brigid’s Well, and an old piece of paper on which I’d copied down: ‘Our single purpose is to magnify that Light we share between us.’

I Packed My Bag

Grace Wells

DNA

My father was sprightly, quiet never complained of ill health rosy face, lively gait and seventeen years older than my mother who was a talker, had ten children, lived in dread of pain, it travelled around her body like a submarine, a metal nose that could erupt absolutely deadly any place from knee to jaw or big toe.

Every morning, I wake and through my half-closed eyes, resting on top of the duvet I survey the early grey light that might in certain lights be gold. What’s it going to be, sprightly or dying? Which one of them which side of one of them and how long will each bit last today?

Michael Coady

A man comforts a woman

– words I come upon under a post-tsunami photo in the newspaper

and read

as a found poem of the ages

once again updated, given to me as a mantra

A man comforts a woman

an assurance that somehow, just like suffering, human comforting persists despite or perhaps because of all that’s lost or broken beyond mending

A man comforts a woman

for all that’s smothered ruined, ravished, wrecked and devastated somewhere sometime anywhere

for all that’s deepest worst most terrible

A man comforts a woman.

Michael Coady

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Mark Roper
Editor
From time to time
red dog shows up in the forest.
I don’t know his name.

‘Dog,’ I call out to his presence.
My voice makes a bell in the woods
which are vague with gnats and thick light.
He steps from behind the dense trees
and stands there, attentive, tongue lolling.
Great cauliflower-domed seed-heads of hogweed
tower the overgrown path.
He waits in the web of the stillness,
red in the green tunnel’s end—
Then, gone.

Dogness of dog into woodness of woods.
My feet make small sounds in the silence.

Not Yet

Five-thirty, mid-March, and already
day has begun. Frost lies in strips
across the park, across our lawn.
Soon the sun will have licked it up,
skinned the air of cold. I want
to kiss the fistfuls of buds
the half-dead pear tree is offering,
the winter-thin honeysuckle clinging
to the once-climbing frame. Above
the iron spidering of Alexandra Palace
three-quarters of the moon is jutting
from a slit in the blue of a sky
clear as a bell. The tube train
that’s just left the station is weaving
its glinting body between roofs
and laceries of willow. I don’t want it
to vanish underground – not yet.
If only I could trap this moment
in cupped hands before it’s flown,
stave off the knock on the door,
the unfolding of the man cradling his wounded brother,
the uncontainable grief – if only
I could pretend time is a clock
whose arrow hands I could pull off,
and stay here dreaming myself
into the copse in the park, selfless
among the wood anemones
about to open their white wings.

The Washing of Feet

It’s the simplest form of healing:
late at night,
the washing of feet.
When the light called sky
is an absence,
when the traffic’s asleep;
when song
is a physical thing
needing physical shape
but you’re just so worn out
facing darkness again
and those brave
tulips and roses
in Merrion Square
have long since turned in
to the dark, cottony
breath that simmers
inside of them.
When the world
is a cave, is a dungeon,
when the angels retreat,
return to this tiny
pacific ocean,
to the washing of feet.

Baltic Amber

Someone said I would uncover pieces of amber
from long-dead trees on this Baltic shoreline.
Day by day, I leave the cottage, walk the sands
to a headland village.

Nobody understands
what I mean when I mention amber, their minds
engrossed by hazel branches hung
with painted eggs, catkins; or hyacinths in bowls.
The time for hyacinths is long gone, I tell them.

I am in need of something that has survived
more than winter, hardening to translucent gold,
enclosing – perhaps – one small seed,
to honour the month and the Easter I was conceived.

I have grown five decades, like aeons,
and my tears have surely become like amber,
enriched and smooth, taking tawny colours
for blood.

Next week I will be casual
about the search, will uncover nuggets
beneath tree fragments,
inhaling salt and resin as I turn freely
from eggs, catkins, those April fevers.

Myra Schneider

Roscommon Rain

When the rain stopped the rain began
And clattered beads of runny light against the panes
Decreased and crept inside the ghosts of sheep
And seeped inside the warmth of prostrate cows.
Then pelted bogs to syrupy peat
Made gravelly lanes glitter again
Beneath the melting greys of cloud and cloud
Pierced the puddles with a thousand stings
Drifting, finer than chimney smoke,
Like a passing pang of some great loss
Away from where more rain was coming in
From somewhere else beyond the world’s rim
Erasing gradually the misconception
That the world had ever not been rain
And rain would cease before the end of time.

James Harpur

Pat Boran

Mary O’Donnell

A Moment In Time