

Medbh McGuckian

**MARINE CLOUD
BRIGHTENING**



Gallery Books

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for Pauline and Helen

Elegy after Dennis O'Driscoll

He had been ten days dead when I heard it,
since Christmas Eve, and buried on New Year's Eve,
with his birthday following on New Year's Day.

No one thought to tell me except Tess;
perhaps they thought such news would break my heart.
My brother Dennis could die as suddenly,
in New Zealand, and I could not go.

Now there will be no more rave reviews
or birthday cards from 12 The Gallops
in the most fastidious italic copperplate
on the planet, or off it, or any other.

I ring Peter to ask for Julie's number
and from Tipperary spring the sweetest air
I know pours through my ear, saying, Dear,
forgive me for still being here.

A Handstitched Balloon

for Michael, in Ward One South

Arils of peace-engorged late moon freezing
on the water, then the late dawn whispering
on our breath: the changing tree-presence
time-deepens the orchardness of the tree-place,
and we love the veteran old trees for their ageing,
their orchard practice — high, honest capturers
and players of weather and light — working trees
and companion trees, even the closed canopy
they made out of larch trees.

A loose bellying north-south zigzag
rends and peels back the air
till the moon is not where it should be
and the earth elongates like a lemon.
The sounds of the taller trees are getting heavier
rather than lighter, the cider trees in the lee
of the hill show a thin branch of appleness
over the lane . . .

Countless journeys have made that path,
flow and flutter of limbs on a flowered
floor covering. And always in the wind,
the proximity of the sea, begrudging
in its beauty.

He had wanted to cut down all the trees
so he could collect stars from all over space
and climb up the telescope's steps with eyes
attuned to the dark crater thirty miles wide
on Venus. But some were missing, and others
recorded with the wrong brightness, up
on the roof of three adjoining houses

which divided the sky between them
so they could cover the entire night:

as each grave seems to have its companion tree,
when we consider a field,
as a stove can be disguised as a statue of love
and, in place of her breasts, two flowers.

Flying Fox

for David Hammond

Through old darkness and a streak of stars
behind the pebbled glass
we do not see the unilluminated doorway
where starlight survives its star.

If the eye were made of fire
sampling its coolness would tell us
how much of the darkening is due.

We do not stop to smell the odour-
lessness of the rhododendrons.
It's easy for the tree to measure
daylight's genuine touching.

The ice in the shadow beneath the leaf
is warmed by the leaf: the leaf
does not warm its shadow.

The air inside your shadow
weighs more than you do: your
shadow weighs nothing, nothing more

than this mirage of silence
slipping words
whose shadow lining gently changes shape

when two waves pass through each other unscathed
by the sound-shadow forming your head.

Living in the Airport

for Paul

Those early maiden days of the year
when the music is almost invisible
drifted news of you. I could see
the green shape of the garden
where we slanted our deckchairs
at the most luxurious angle.

The hounds of spring on winter's traces
caused an uproar in the newspapers;
with respect to the smallest brook
the readymade weather was bled
by otherworldly rounding out.

I was trying not to bump into anything
like an old neighbour who never went
beyond the landing. My passport
was a silver branch in a cream-wove
envelope scented from a rose of temperament
in the head of the sea.

The dazzling succession of the seasons
spread out their carpet of codes
like rehearsals for the hereafter
where this year's love wears horseskin moccasins.

Christ with his silence and his kiss.
One of his rings is of elephant hair
but the street does not show itself off
and we cannot arise and go there.

The Seed Mantra: A Gift Poem

Sweeping up a leaf
that blew in last November
I thought, there will be no more
autumns, I shall have no more winter
this year, I thought it best
to omit the season.

I went out in a fiery field
to find a propitious name
for a child in the four
afterlife realms, and something
was bestowed, a plaited blonde
wave-shape in faded yellow.

Yet everything was white,
the textile handles with ribbons.
The double line of gold
around the dust of some,
the scythes cutting through the pearl
of this year's sequence of wet and fine.