

Gerald Dawe

**THE LAST
PEACOCK**



Gallery Books

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Contents

PART ONE

- East Pier *page* 13
- House of Fiction 14
- Rock Bottom 15
- Love in a Time of Distress 16
- Filling the Tanks 17
- John Cheever's Dublin 18
- Valerian 19
- Keepsake 20
- To Richard Ford Beyond in America 21

PART TWO

- The Last Peacock 25
- The Cold-blooded Moon 26
- Vigil, Wood Quay, Galway 27
- Land of Dreams 28
- Early Days 30
- Looking Back 31
- Swimmer 32
- Sweet Time 33
- Elegy 34
- A Visit 35
- Ely 36
- The Corpus Clock 37
- Leaves for Burning 38
- Via Dolorosa 39
- Home Again 40
- Selfies 41
- Sects, 1984 42
- Tongues of Fire 43
- Suddenly 44
- The Birds 45
- Plinth, Berkeley Library, Trinity College 46
- Returning 47
- Eddie Sleeps 48

Air Miles 49
Neighbourhood Watch 50
Twine 51
The Wound 52
The Good Suit 53

Acknowledgements 55

for Dorothea

Early Days

1

Indistinct, the sun's bland concern
ignores you both in the bay's mouth,
twisting to more islands, the ribs of a boat,
sunk in glaur, arch like wings of a prehistoric bird
and you're out of calling, rising a welter
of midges around the dead wood —
a friend, a child, a far cry from my staring
into the space that's between us.

2

At the corner where the kids cry fair hell
three men share a bottle of Old Cellar
but don't heed the long dead and buried
they sit among, the crooked gravestones
around a weeping elm — are we all haunted
like them by a nearly forgotten love, the father
who left, ghosts of one kind or another?

Looking Back

Before I knew it the train pulled out of the station
and you were on the platform running after it —
I was in the moving carriage looking back
as you called out my name, again and again.

Swimmer

Milo Smith 1998-2016

He was diving as if his life
depended on it and from where
we sat, lording it over
the slow tide and morning mist,
recall the swallow dive,
the soaking pads of his feet,
the backflip, the outrageous
bellyflop that brought us up short
before, like a veteran, he lapped
up the last of the sun on his face,
the curious night music of cicada
and olive trees whispering about
the silent hours, a shuttered house.

Sweet Time

for Caroline Canning

On these usual walks by the river
the dog sniffs out sudden scents,
something caught in a second's breeze,
the upturn of a breath of fresh air
that the sculling set brings
under the bridge's eye, their beat strikes
as one the flat water and swish
of oars that has us stopped by this
slender commotion, they on the move,
bodies within level water,
we on the tangled bank of rushes
the slow waves soundlessly breach.

Elegy

Aodán Mac Póilin 1948-2016

Timorous birdsong from the churchyard
where Sarah Hall and her husband John lie.
Next door the house of the last hangman
displays his trade with a sign of the gibbet tree.
Then on a cold wintry morning
as a bunch of foreign kids check messages
before their day begins
I hear about your plight, dear friend.

We wouldn't have been up and at it this early;
sea foam would've been flying
over the road, those scornful Sundays,
when the wind battered against windows and doors
and in and out of the draughty house
we rented, heading up the coast
where no one lived on the seashore,
we managed to 'survive' it all — the 'war' —

without really knowing for how long.
Now your blurred voice and familiar laughter
can't conceal the end of the road —
and how you'd baulk at that, for sure —
head tilted, eyes closed, that's how it was,
'In Praise of the City of Mullingar'
in one place after another, timelessly.
We've been caught out at last.

A Visit

Gerard Fanning 1952-2017

Bees at the lavender beds hop
and skip and settle momentarily —
'So many of them are there
once you start really looking,
and then at dusk they make
their way off, is it?, westwards . . .'

As we yarn a couple of gardens
away the innocent child swings
and sings to himself in the sunlight
of high-up marshalling rooks,
the odd passing shadow of a cloud.
And now this, the hesitant breath.

Are you the same boy smashing
through the salty waves,
or strolling at a countryman's pace
by once-known family fields,
a little out of sorts —
'You know yourself' —

the nights drawing in
along the vivid coast
rather than here or hereabouts,
the noisy trees settle down
to your kind of silence,
the 'watchful' imminent dawn.