

Medbh McGuckian

**BLARIS
MOOR**



Gallery Books

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*for the Jade-maidens,
Ruth, Mabel and Rosemary*

An Early Apocalypse

I see the skeleton of the year
poised in the cool moonspray,
trying to catch at the blemished
calendar of the next.

Embraced most of the day
by the low and slender rainbow,
the world-jewel sweeps on
with its morning, noon and night.

The nowhereness of the fifth-month grass
stayed for a moment only,
before the earthless mountain light
anointed without mountains.

In 1797 four young militiamen were tried by Court Martial in Belfast for connexion with the United Irishmen, convicted, and immediately afterwards shot at a place called Blaris or Blaris Moor in the County Down, near Lisburn; in an event that caused intense and widespread indignation in Ulster. To commemorate this, a spirited ballad of eight verses — of the characteristic peasant type — was composed, the author of which was believed to be Garland the 'Lurgan Poet'. . . . That the ballad should have been sung to so many different airs and settings, in Munster as well as in Ulster, indicates its widespread popularity.

— P W Joyce (*Old Folk Music and Songs*, 1909)

The Reading Fever

The heart experiences systole,
small controlled doses of forgetfulness.
The intellect performs a full resolution
as though to a light by which
it went on being touched
on the continent's northern fringe.

The world is like a ring from a spouse
not yet stabilized in glory,
a sacrament performed by an unworthy priest
whose superessential gleam is hidden
in an offering — the sensible, the coastal
grasses still in winter head, the apple.

The Nymph Hay

If the muse should choose a language
she would choose this flawless English
to fold her thought in that entire quasi-family
of words, as I filled the false pockets of your coat
with uncombed lavender blossoms.

Once familiar things are more naked
than your skin darkened with *soorma*,
a Russian word meaning destruction,
as in the first wartime colour photograph,
Zenana, true bed woman, Saint Quadphone.

The Stone-word

A finer-grained time lies thicker on the ground.
We take out the warm lining of overcoats,
replace one sleeve with a sleeve of a different colour.

Beyond the slower times the city dreams itself,
dreams *of* itself, its footprints, the nightwalk,
alarm all night becomes a kind of weather.

There was no walk, not for me, nothing to read,
sick without books, I wasted day,
the young, strong, demanding sun, the unwounded leaves.

Useless in the shadows of the sheds, I invented
a small abandoned notebook of doubts
concerning words, held it between my two heart fingers.

And the sight of the end of the platform
loosened a very long perfume that had ease
of gathering into my ceiling blue as an eyelid.

Trans-shipment Station

A cloud of down feathers hovers
about the city
like the nakedness of the right hand
touching the left.

Two letters on weather,
patterned in the form of kisses,
ushered in a moonlight that scalds
the shell-pocked Holiday Inn.

Someone agreeing to a kiss after death
is trying to stand up where mothers
taught their children to fall to the ground.

An acute memory of two kisses
situated between two other kisses
made a trench in my forehead.
Dustings of mud disintegrated
on the bed.

If a mountain is to appear
when we are willingly considering war
of an evening he slowly raises
his open hand and holds it above his eyebrows,
light blue being the infantry colour.