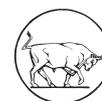


Seán Lysaght

# CARNIVAL MASKS



Gallery Books

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*in memory of John Hurst*

*Skylarks in January*

None since October,  
and now there are four  
calling across the clouds,  
still dragging a grey hawser

that ends in the sea  
after weeks in the links  
while the waves poured thunder.  
It's an early release

of that high, blinding obsession  
with the sun's glare  
to make every hill disappear  
through the eye of a song

when all love wants —  
there in the heather — is a nest,  
a few stray notes,  
a closer look at that crest.

## *Catkins*

When February turns mild  
alder catkins expand,  
yellow-green mills of gold  
that I disperse with my hand.

The hazels are finer,  
pale yellow tails  
of tree-semen that find  
the deep crimson of the female.

Ah, this is the seed of the wind,  
which I scatter for you  
wherever you touch or bend  
in the bright dew.

## *March Wind*

Wind scours the bones of the living.  
Mornings wake, bleary-eyed  
from weeping the breezes.  
Walls hold

but wind-noise still penetrates  
to the core,  
grinds back the comforts of myth  
to the original rib.

Who are these, lighting their fire,  
going through the motions of a day  
with a wind pack  
constantly worrying and tugging?

What would we say  
to the stars of their eyes?  
How could words cross  
the tors of their teeth?

Clouds ride the blue  
on an occasional sunny day,  
snapping Kodak time back  
to their anxious hearth

and, somehow,  
a thrush does the job  
of all creation  
in its late winter station

attacking blustery dark  
with reiterated song  
and, through the abyss  
of this relentless air,

a kestrel's double blade  
is working the wind  
so that the eye might anchor  
a mind to the land,

hold down its clatter  
of loose galvanized  
on a shed where  
some poor turf is husbanded.

Dated pages  
litter the ditch,  
a sheepdog keeps to its blown fur  
and the crocus shivers

to offer saffron to the world.  
Nothing now in cold blood  
could ever be witness here  
to stirring branches as they catch fire.

## *The Arrival of Swallows*

Back in Mayo after an Italian winter  
we have no more use for our carnival masks.  
They lie redundant as spring comes into colour,  
the long-regarded hedges suddenly vigorous.

Into the confusion of this deepening green  
a hare runs, like a player offside,  
caught between an eye that held the moon  
and a pace that could lift the countryside,

always unexpected, at an angle  
to the attitude of a big lonely house  
where the owner guards an empty shell  
against the excesses of the wilderness,

until the swallows showed up, that is,  
winging it low, always switching the game.  
The place they wanted back was this  
drive, this very porch where they swept in

to chatter over the nests at last year's door  
and start again by confounding every metaphor.