

Pearse Hutchinson

LISTENING TO BACH



Gallery Books

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Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| But For Her | page 11 |
| Anna Bligh | 12 |
| Priest and Car, 1969 | 13 |
| York Road | 14 |
| What a Young Man Said to My Mother | 16 |
| Tuning Fork Chair-leg | 18 |
| On a Summer Day in West Cork | 20 |
| Names | 21 |
| Triana | 22 |
| Santarem | 24 |
| The Scent of Memory | 26 |
| All Four Letters of It | 28 |
| Doorways | 29 |
| Near the Grand Canal | 30 |
| Basement Bar | 31 |
| The Woman Who Chose Cakes | 32 |
| Naming Water | 33 |
| Shanty Towns near Barcelona | 34 |
| Mitteleuropa | 36 |
| Green Window | 37 |
| Valencia | 38 |
| Matsudaira | 40 |
| Resistance | 41 |
| Sleepwalking 1 | 42 |
| After the Pageant | 43 |
| Moffat | 44 |
| Light | 45 |
| Milarepa | 46 |
| In Praise of French | 49 |
| Lakes in Leitrim | 50 |
| The Abbot of Piro | 52 |
| Ruudi in Amsterdam | 54 |
| Two Degrees | 55 |
| Pipers and a Fiddler | 56 |
| Merrion Square, 1948 | 57 |
| Sleepwalking 2 | 58 |

Listening to Bach 61
Letter to Kazantzakis 62
Still 63
Swans 64
On the Locker 65
Mistaking Cavafy 66

Holograph Near the Grand Canal 68

Acknowledgements 71

He donat la meua vida al amor dels amics.

I've given my life to the love of friends.

But For Her

On very cold nights when I was a child in bed
he took my feet between his hands to warm them,
believing warm feet kept all the body warm,
and it worked and I slept through the cold.

Out for walks, when I got tired,
he carried me on his back.
What age was I when, walking along the canal,
approaching Latouche Bridge,
I stopped, looked up at him and said:

‘Carry, Daddy, carry!’
and he leant down to take me up
but she put a stop to it
looking down at me, decreeing:
‘You’re too big now to be carried.’

What age was I before that, when,
standing on a traffic island
in the middle of O’Connell Bridge,
holding her hand, waiting to cross,
I looked up at her and said:
‘Mammy, I only want you.’

That began to stop when, at fifteen,
I discovered sex,
and went on stopping when, at seventeen,
I discovered booze.

Years later she told me, bitterly:
‘I put my hands under your feet.’

But for her, often enough,
we might have gone hungry,
me an’ him.

Anna Bligh

Anna Bligh, Premier of Queensland,
speaking to her fellow citizens
on the brink of a great storm:

‘Grab each other and get
to a place of safety,
remember that people are irreplaceable.’

Listening, I’m back in my early twenties
standing in the middle of the kitchen
squaring up to my mother

who’s just, her eyes mastering mine,
told me, bitter and sad:
‘Nobody is irreplaceable.’

I know at once she’s wrong, know it
with every fibre of my being.
I’m shocked that she should think that

and tell her so, angrily:
‘Nobody is re-placeable’
and fling myself out of the house.

My father knows nothing of all this hurt,
he’s already in his refuge —
the back garden, tending the fruit.

Priest and Car, 1969

A tall, thin priest, well over six foot, complete with biretta and ankle-length soutane is walking slowly along one of those calm, broad, pale-grey footpaths which are one of the glories of Barcelona’s finest boulevard, the Paseo de Gracia (as it was called then, though not by all), reading his breviary.

On his left are three or four parked cars, shiny but undistinguished, the avant-garde of a new and blasphemous campaign. He ignores them — he still has the centre all to himself.

A car moves slowly along the footpath, directly behind the priest. This goes on for perhaps three or four minutes. If words pass between priest and driver, I’m not close enough to hear.

The priest stops walking.

The car stops moving.

The priest turns around, holds his hand up, the palm of prohibition foremost.

The confrontation is brief and long; it ends with the car slowly backing away until it slides off the footpath and joins the traffic in the roadway.

The priest, once more walking slowly, goes on reading his breviary.

York Road

Walking down York Road
making for Upper Rathmines
at the point where high hedges
give way to low walls
a man and a woman
come towards me, both stout,
middle-aged, well-hapt-up,
the man slightly ahead,
they used to be called tinkers,
the woman's hair still fair,
that glorious distinctive shade.

Today the three of us
are alone in the road.

The man and I exchange
perfunctory greetings
but the woman stops me:
'Do you like apples?' she says,
offering a brown-paper bag
with two big red apples in it
impaling me on the horns
of a truth-teller's dilemma
for I never liked biting
apples and much less now,

but to tell her the truth —
would be unforgivably rude.
Besides, what would Martin
Buber think of me?

So I tell a happy lie —
my mother turning in her grave,
my father dancing in his —
and thank the kind woman,

and she and I exchange
heartfelt good wishes, and part.