

Dermot Healy

# THE TRAVELS OF SORROW

*Edited by Peter Fallon*



Gallery Books

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### *Editor's Note*

Prior to his death on 29 June 2014 Dermot and I had been talking about what would be his fifth collection. I have shaped this book out of the draft manuscript he sent to me and out of the poems he wrote in the months afterwards. I pay special thanks to Dermot's widow, Helen Gillard, for her help and trust in the preparation of *The Travels of Sorrow*.

'The Whispering Shells' reprises, and condenses, a poem of the same name, 'for Inor', in *The Reed Bed* (2001).

Acknowledgments are due to *The Irish Times* (Gerard Smyth), *Poetry Ireland Review* (Vona Groarke) and the *Stony Thursday Book* (Peter Sirr) where a few of these poems were published first.

*Peter Fallon  
Loughcrew  
March 2015*

*The Travels of Sorrow*

*for the McSweeneys*

Years ago, one of the two  
brothers, Pat Donlon,

who did the cooking in the house  
in a long apron to below the knee,

went into a rage  
and took the china

in the house —  
the flower vase,

the milk jug,  
the big plates —

and threw them  
onto the rocks

on the beach.  
Years later,

as I built up  
a wall of stone

against the sea,  
I began to find

here a handle,  
there a small flower,

set in delph.  
And they were all

the one style  
of porcelain

that came with the house.  
A thousand, thousand

high tides  
have been and gone

and, with a terrible  
sadness,

these broken remains  
of an old argument on the alt

are coming in  
amongst the gravel,

petals from the dresser  
and the mantelpiece,

the little fractures  
of despair —

shouting, I've had enough!  
Take it, take it all! —

are gathering  
in the surf.

For years they've been going out  
and in with the tide.

Sorrow never travels  
far from home.

### *All the Rumours*

All the rumours ended  
when the drowned man rose  
in the reeds at Rosses.  
At last the dog left the spot

and came home shaking,  
then went to the house  
of a friend of his master  
and lay down.

The only true witness  
to what had really happened,  
he shed hair on the mat  
and ate the leavings

of their first breakfast together.

*As You Get Older*

As you get older  
and the pen begins to run out

you begin — without thinking —  
to thank the god

you do not believe in.  
It's the man

who does not believe  
believes most

by saying, over and over,  
in a repetitive prayer,

I do not believe,  
I do not believe in anything out there.

So when you  
start

cursing the god that does not exist  
and the pen fills with anger

that's when  
faith

and tyranny  
begin.

*The Many Wonders of John Conway*

Listen to this  
and remember it always.

John Conway  
often told me over the years

these are the wonders  
of Maugherow —

*A blanket to fill  
the bed of the ocean,*

*a boot to fit  
the foot of the mountain,*

*a jennet's foal,  
a square arsehole,*

*and the tops of the rushes green.*