

John McAuliffe

# THE WAY IN



Gallery Books

*The Way In*  
is first published  
simultaneously in paperback  
and in a clothbound edition  
on 28 May 2015.

The Gallery Press  
Loughcrew  
Oldcastle  
County Meath  
Ireland

[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)

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ISBN 978 1 85235 630 9 *paperback*  
978 1 85235 631 6 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

*The Way In* receives financial assistance  
from the Arts Council.



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*for Nancy*

‘But if that Land be there, quoth he, as here,  
And is their Heaven likewise there all one?’

## *Very*

It's a colour

it's walking in the dark

It's the road

It's a car we drove

it's crying

alternately to

it's trying

work and holidays

it's a small dog you loved to juggle on your foot

In cities it's the beach

it's a night

it's a glass of wine

it's the morning and the radio

in a small glass

saying something out loud, oblivious

There is more

it's mid-afternoon, once in a while,

it's very

it's very you

## *Shed*

*for Peter Fallon*

I bought the shed, for a song, off a neighbour  
who'd stopped using it after he paved the garden.  
He'd inherited it or got it somewhere he couldn't remember,  
not that I gave a second thought to its origin.

It was heavier than it looked so he helped take the roof to  
pieces.  
After an hour prying out each crooked tack  
we levered off its grey-green sandpaper stiffness  
and rested it, on the drive, like a book stranded on its back.

The neighbour, looking at his watch, said, 'Let's push',  
and the four walls and floor did move — a little.  
In front of the garage, sweating, feeling each  
ounce of the previous night, we saw too late

it was too big to go through. We counted the nails but couldn't:  
they were like stars, more the more we looked. 'Heave it over,'  
over the garage and down, he joked,  
the garden path to its resting place under the magnolia.

No joke: we made a ramp of the ladder and inched  
this half-tonne pine crate up and out of the road.  
The scraped-flat garage roof pitched  
under our careful feet. Two euphoric beers later, after we'd  
lowered

it into place, we agreed on twenty quid. Every so often  
he still calls in: today he's selling up and getting out.  
He asks about the shed. I say it's fine, so half hidden  
by April gusts of leaf and petal he can hardly see it,

as we look, out the window, at where it leans  
against the fence, painted green, the unlocked door  
opening on the lawnmower and half-full cans  
of paint and petrol, pure potential, evaporating into the air.

But work makes work: paving the lot, he volunteers, makes  
more sense.

I'm offering him a cup of tea  
when, before he can collect himself, he starts to resent  
the twenty quid and leaving the shed behind: 'It was,' he says,  
'almost free.'

## *The Retreat*

*for Lucy and Jerry*

1

A quiet house with, once  
in a while, sirens.  
An office, the computer  
hooked to a printer

and offline. A white wall  
and a desk with nothing on it at all  
except what I put there. This. The bell  
of that church, clean and punctual.

Not diggers, or a road crew,  
a mobile's humming or even  
a party. No books, newspapers. No one  
complaining about hours. And the view?

High Street. A newsagent, a nail bar.  
The post office that's part of the Spar  
and the Spar that's part of the off-license  
I won't drive past — is that the hour? —

to the out-of-town shopping centres.

2

Jangle the hangers in the empty wardrobe.  
Size up the flaws in the mirror.  
Shift wrinkled clothes from the suitcase to the paper-lined  
drawer.



A hair in the twelfth chapter of a long American novel;  
one picture on the mantelpiece at a different angle,  
a girl looking down at her Scottie, with a parasol.  
That's all.  
The cleaner, though she doesn't look it, is professional.



All week the bluebottles I've gone after  
with a folded-up newspaper  
*buzz* still, *buzz buzz*, above the desk and up and down the flat.  
Until today, coming back from a long dinner,  
I swat them, not with the paper but the Bloodaxe Neruda,  
*splat*, or a sound very like that. And that.

3

Mist lifts from the yard's gravel pit.  
Planted bushes  
look like birds' nests, and host  
unplanned, half emerged visitors,  
one a cat, and a couple

holding hands, chancing their arms,  
the yard a slow motion arena  
they crunch, one alongside the other,  
absorbing the heat of the sun.

The whole place is empty, waiting.  
Voices carry into it,  
someone shouting from the kitchen,  
'Your problem is you don't listen.'

4

A day nothing will darken:  
in the shaded kitchen  
a space clears as the leaf  
of the table is lifted level.

And what is it in the silence  
that appears? 1985, sand, towels  
draped across the chairs,  
her voice, arranging the place,

Ambre Solaire, his big shoulders  
painfully hot and shedding skin  
which rubs off as it is handled  
or, under my fingernail,

peels away in thin,  
papery patches. Sheer,  
blurring wing-scrap  
I look through.