

Gerald Dawe

**SELECTED
POEMS**



Gallery Books

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Names

They call this 'the Black North',
black from the heart out.
It doesn't matter about
particularities when mouths
mumble the handy sayings
and day-in minds tighten.

I've been here having thought
nowhere else was possible.
A condition of destiny or what
the old generations only fumbled
with: conceit, success, a fair
share of decent hardship.

In this extreme, perched
on the edge of the Atlantic,
you feel to look down
and gather around the details,
thinking to store them away,
bundle and pack in the exile's way.

Line up and through the turn-
stile, click the ticket
and wait till you're clear of it.
You need never recall
the other names.

Memory

for Bridget O'Toole

It is a desert of rock
the rain has finally withered
till we are left black
dots on a shrinking island.

We come like pilgrims
wandering at night through
the dim landscape. A blue
horizon lurks behind whin
bushes and narrows to pass
the pitch-black valley.

We are at home. A place
as man-forsaken as this
must carry like the trees a silent
immaculate history. Stones
shift under the cliff's shadow;
nearby the tide closes in,
master of the forgotten thing.

Secrets

I was coming-of-age in a sparse
attic overlooking the sluggish tide.

Down the last flight of stairs
a grandfather clock struck

its restless metronome to those
who went about their business

with a minimum of fuss.
My puritan fathers, for instance,

stumbled from separate beds
and found their place

under the staunch gaze
of monumental heroes, frozen

stiff in the act of sacrifice;
they had always been

tight-lipped about God-
knows-what secrets.

A Question of Covenants

28 September 1912

The *Patriotic* turns to face
an invisible sea. From Castle Place
thousands swarm through side streets
and along the unprotected quays
just to glimpse Carson, gaunt as usual,
who watches the surge of people
call, *Don't leave us. You mustn't leave us,*
and in the searchlight's beam,
his figure arched across the upper deck,
he shouts he will come back
and, if necessary, fight this time.

It is what they came to hear
in the dark September night.
As the *Patriotic* sails out
Union colours burst in rockets
and bonfires scar the hills
he departs from, a stranger to both sides
of the lough's widening mouth
and the crowd's distant singing
'Auld Lang Syne' and 'God Save the King'.