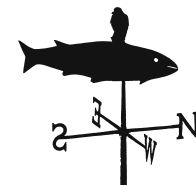


Michael Coady

GOING BY WATER



Gallery Books

Going by Water
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 22 November 2009.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

*All rights reserved. For permission
to reprint or broadcast this work,
write to The Gallery Press.*

© Michael Coady 2009

ISBN 978 1 85235 484 8 *paperback*
978 1 85235 485 5 *clothbound*

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

Contents

Morning Bell *page* 13

PART ONE

Sister River

- Leac na Tine 17
- Finding a Name 19
- June Impromptu 21
- Stitching the Bridge 23
- Talitha Cumi 24
- The Friars' Rock 26
- The Feast of Saint Nicholas 27
- Voices off the River
 - 1 NEW YEAR'S EVE 28
 - 2 WHAT PADDY DOHERTY REMEMBERS
MUNDY HAYDEN TELLING 30
 - 3 TITANIC 31
 - 4 THE WOBBLER'S TALE 31
 - 5 DREAM COUNTRY 32
 - 6 THE STRANGER 33
 - 7 THE SCALES OF THE SALMON 35
- Going by Water 37

PART TWO

Tidings

- Interview on Main Street 45
- Stormy Weather, 1938 47
- A Winter's Night, a Gershwin Song 48
- Breast Stroke 51
- Isn't History Great? 53
- The Inside-out Beckett Umbrella 55
- O Wonderful World of Ironmongery 58
- The Mysteries 59
- Asking for Water 64
- Passing Predator 66
- The Woman of Five Bathrooms 68
- The Open Gate 69

PART THREE

Another River

- Crash Course in French 73
- The Joie de Vivre of Annick and Pierre 75
- Good Friday 78
- Fête de la Musique 81
- The Nun in Prison 83
- A Litany for Monsieur Sax 90
- The Muse in Passing 93
- Crann Sráide / Street Tree 94
- Mozart and the Kiss of Time 96
- The Hunger 99
- Children of Montparnasse 100
- Sunday Afternoon at Auvers-sur-Oise 106

PART FOUR

Traces

- Beethoven and the Leaves 111
- Between the Beats at The Moorings Bar 112
- Fionnuala Grieving at Checkout 5 113
- Dusk at Inishlounaght 114
- Slow Air 115
- The Friday Rounds 116
- The Electric 118
- Listen while I tell you . . . 120
- Sheela na Gig 122
- Exposure 125
- The Half-light of History
 - 1 AT A KILLING FIELD 127
 - 2 SCHOOL TOUR, KILMAINHAM JAIL 127

PART FIVE

All Waters

- Three Down 131
- Tender is the Rain 132

- Dunville Old Folks' Home 135
- Seldom Come By 137
- Elementary 139
- Water under the Bridge 140
- Easter Vigil, Massachusetts 146
- Never Again 148
- Old Flame 150
- Ballinderry Fruit 151
- The Great Embrace 155

Home 159

Notes 161

Acknowledgements 165

The Friars' Rock

We come to rivers when we are young or old.

— Derek Mahon, 'Waterfront'

The boulder deep midstream
has never shown itself in air
nor shifted since the glacier
dropped it there
twelve thousand years ago
where in immeasurable
course of flowing seasons, floods and tides,
in human time when Joan of Arc
was still a child,
Franciscan monks arrived
to build a salmon weir
upstream of the rock

and in their generations
swimmers out beyond their depth
on lost summer days
stood up in mid-flow
when they found footing
as they still do
on that hidden mark
that's settled there

still bedded
in the flow
and rooted
beyond time
within the dreaming
heads of all who've ever
come and swam and gone
or still live on
beside the sister river.

The Feast of Saint Nicholas

Wind rises in the night,
growls and whines, then holds
its breath, as though
pretending it's said all
it means to say.

Across the river
a man lies sleepless,
listening to the dark
breath on the water
and its tidings,

hands crossed on his breast,
seeking to grip
the shadow within.



Easter tide

The Woman of Five Bathrooms

after Mangan

O woman of five bathrooms, to brag is not your way.
You joke about extravagance: what would our grannies say?
Coffee-morning chatter turns to diet and aerobics,
property and liposuction, restaurants and clothes.

Your husband dreams beside you, O woman of five bathrooms,
he plans makeovers of the past to be launched upmarket.
He means to make a killing on some tumbled famine village
(nine cottages, a harbour, views of lake and river).

O woman of five bathrooms, what use all this ablution?
Does money always bring with it a hungering for purity?
He knows where he's going; you wonder what it's for.
Your father lying in the earth. Your mother in a home.

Slide out of the warmth to take a sleeping pill and pee,
then wash your hands, lie down again and pray the dark
brings ease.
O woman of five bathrooms, the clock blinks through the
night,
in time this master bedroom will lie open to the sky.

The Open Gate

'We pass through fire and water,' said the black man in an upper room by the West Gate. 'Through water and through fire, my friend. Here you are welcome. And the lady also, though our service is almost finished for today.'

In this third-floor room of a high house full of silenced story.

'Thank you,' he says to the preacher. 'As we were passing home from church we heard singing, too early in the day to be from Nora's bar next door. It drew us on into the lane, then up the stairs. To see what was the story here.'

Once upon a Sunday in September, passing home by the West Gate.

'The story, it is this,' the black man says. 'The holy spirit is the oil. The oil of the morning. And each one of us a lamp. That is the story. The lamp, it must be ready and be worthy.'

And while he speaks resplendent women out of Africa sing praise and soothe their babies in this sunlit upper room. Sing out without restraint in this high house which looks down on the street that dips down to the river that forever seems to leave.

Here where Darby Rourke the dancing master once threw scandalous soirées. *Pléaráca na Ruairceach*. Cardplay. Assig-nation. Beakers filled. Before last harpers gathered in Belfast.

They sing of light this now and here, the women out of Africa, where revels once were warm in candlelight and shadow. Planxty and quadrille. Bowls of punch. Raised up on a table, the fiddler Kelly and Ó hÍffearnáin the piper play 'The Rights of Man'. Until the time of bloodied pikes down-river and public floggings for names of United Men, when Lord Kingsborough had Kelly the fiddler flogged to the bone and then threw salt upon his lacerated back.

'Yes, you are welcome here among us in the Lord's great name. On this day and in this place. Amen.' So says the black man, with alleluias echoed in an upper room by the West Gate.

Behind the preacher, through high windows facing down

to take in Bridge Street, there's Tom Carroll. Trumpet player. Barber. Backlit, on a mission. Leaving his shop again. To slip up to the bookie's and check the odds at Goodwood, Listowel or Longchamps before the off. Then back to heads and hair. Countrymen come in on Sunday mornings. Across the bridge from County Waterford. Talk of weather, harvest, hurling, horses.

'And you too, my lady. Most welcome now, and when we gather here again. We must pass through fire and water but it is the oil of the morning that lights us through the day and through the dark. The oil of each beginning in the spirit, yes. And the lamp that must be ready and be worthy to show light. This is the story of the story. If you wish, do come and join us here again.'

'We thank you,' he says, shaking hands. 'We thank you all.' He almost adds 'in the Lord's name', but hesitates and then refrains.

From its tower outside, the clock above West Gate strikes one. Gatecrashers in their own place, they begin to back away and down the stairs. From eyes of black babies and an outstretched web of hands.

PART THREE

Another River



One day by the Seine I happened to meet . . .