

Seán Lysaght

**SELECTED
POEMS**



Gallery Books

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The Village Tailor

A man on the run from Lord Sheffield
took refuge in the carr
and built himself a reed-shanty.

He bent pins to barbless hooks,
then set lines of tailor's thread,
like tense spider-web, in splash and pool.

Coarse fish were his staple,
his world, muck up to the shin
where mud-bird and gallinule lived;

he slept little at night in the fen,
surrounded by nocturnal life:
chirp of moorhen, boom of bittern.

Poor Bob was a-cold in his marsh of refuge
as the well-fed bailiffs galloped by
on firmer ground.

To no avail
the cunning-woman came with cakes
and a plea to submit to the Lord —

he took only the food
and went wading back into the rushes,
towards toads and birds.

They found him crawling on all fours,
almost crab, mad from swampy nature.
Some overcame their fear to minister to the creature.

Going Back

We're driving off —
an angry car abandoning
the yard, as cottage doors
close after us. The old
wash our plates in vacant rooms,
scour the pans of soured affections,
and resume their vigils
by the soft clocks of memory.

We're driving away
from the rutted tracks
in a craft that keeps us
from land and rain.
Too late now to go back,
the small road
conducts our haste
to the tense carriageways we maintain.

We're driving on
past the first warehouses
of the city we espouse.
No random logs or bones,
no sudden hoards
disturb our neat trajectory
over the smooth concrete
to suburbs of lost history.

We drive down
into the eve of new lives
where the old home haunts us
like a holiday.
A child sleeps in the rear seat,
sure of the future we make.
Behind him charred bridges
to quiet fields, the chances we take.

Guillemot

You'll have seen me pointing to a bird
among gannets on a cliff
and heard me say *guillemot*,
in the guise of a maker.

I want you to have that name
for the first time,
to say it again
if our love stays unbroken.

If we part
it will have been a word
between two boats at sea
after their oarsmen have spoken.

Cuckoo

Scarcer now
than when he named himself
to every meadow in the townland
when the hay was down,

as I stood on the butt of the wain,
bedding in what tumbled from the pikes
with *cuck-oo*
repeated from the next acre.

So I drifted off
to stalk nearer the bird.
The song got louder
along the bristly edge of the headland.

I hadn't said a word
when my uncle came
calling 'Seán!'
and so I lost the cuckoo.

A Midge Charm

Breeze god
get up and scatter the armies of the itchy witch

Rain god
ruin their gathering veil

Cloud god
forbid this travesty of your image

Horse god
shake your heathery mane

Water god
splash your frown of ripples

Hill god
lead us out of all hollows

Turf god
preserve us with your smoke

Frost god
put on your white coat
and lock them all away!

A Discovery

August, an evening, and I'd had enough
of the meandering river's question.
That web of fields and abandoned walls
in the valley's upper reaches were in my fatigue
with the stone's character of toil and heartbreak
as the lidded evening thickened and I took
the peat of the river bank in my booted stride.
I walked *andante*, to the metronome of an ending,
when another crossed the twilit footbridge
con brio, in his day's closing passage,
making for a grassy patch near the river
and unloading a bulky pack of gear.
Who was this loner setting up for the night?
He had, of course, reached his wilderness
just as I was passing under cover
of the river's noise on the rising turf-bank opposite.
I supposed he wasn't there to be hailed
or challenged by someone who had got there
earlier, who would spoil an original story,
and I kept going, so as not to be seen.
And yet, here are the prints in that peat,
that steady exhalation where a range is stored
of a river diminishing to the cold
of spawning water at the top of its catchment.
The camper could have looked up from his preparations
to read the figure disappearing downstream
who had, in his turn, established his own pitch
where he imagined no one had been watching.
I held my pace steady in my aloneness
and never looked back until now, to revise
that favourite valley into a stage for eyes
and to realize how happily I walked
into the script of my own occasion.