

John McAuliffe

OF ALL PLACES



Gallery Books

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Contents

Old Style	page 11
The Coming Times	12
Of All Places	13
Grave Goods	14
Bringing the Baby to Rossaveal	15
A Mountain Road	16
Badgers	17
The Listowel Arms	18
Crash	20
On 'The Road to Sintra'	23
Aerialist	24
Continuity	26
A Danger to Shipping	27
My Adolescence in New Zealand	28
Jane Eyre in Derry	29
North Korea	30
Capital	31
Night Manoeuvres	32
Week 2	33
Batman	34
Loose Ends	35
Arguing about Stars near Inch	36
Marriage, the Realist Tradition	38
Snow	40
New Year	41
Of All Places	42
Northwestern	43
A Likeness	44
House Fire	45
Influence	46
The Changing Room	47
Canvas	48
A Game of Li Bo	49
St Turvey at Lusk	50
A Deaf Ear	51

Sunrise	52
Recess	53
Interludes	
1 CALLING OUT	54
2 MOWER	54
Black Box	55
The Oasis on Tuesdays	56
The Territorial Army	57
Odd Hours	
1 DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME, OUTSIDE BLACKBURN	58
2 THE NEWS ON RITZ STREET	58
3 READING ON TELEGRAPH	58
4 DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME, ST LOUIS	59
Transfers	60
By the Sea, in England	62
A Name	64
The Whole Show	65
Address to Russ	66
The Hallway Mirror	67
A Midgie	68
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	70

for Nancy

Old Style

Not just the lay-by, or the motorway
or its central reservation.

Not just the ring road, or the cul-de-sac
with its pretty forsythia border.

Not just the house, or its extension,
and its hundred windows shining away.

Instead the known world and the unseen,
to which you'll come back:

that is, the point of departure, the destination,
and all points in between.

A free drift to nowhere in particular.

All that way, and back again.

The Coming Times

The towns are not so dark that no one enters;
in nearby docks the nights
advance on empty lots.
Fanatics gather in community centres.

A dry spell engenders nostalgia for rain.
The news will consider
the negligent doctor
and who is immune to the variant strain.

In cooler queues low-slung jeans
date the waspie;
the bright bars are smoke-free
as the ocean's photic zones.

The downturn floats the clearance sale:
staff migrate
and the market
anticipates no return; churches fill,

the ice cap melts, the deserts spread:
north and south
a dolphin's found in every port;
new forms of algae feather the tide.

The boats will travel day and night
and some make land.
For the time being, out of mind
is out of sight:

from the dawning dark
no one shouts, no walk-outs.
Someone organizes scouts,
someone patrols the park.

Of All Places

. . . limestone later, then gneiss and a little quartz,
corbelling later again; the antler-pin points
towards an open central place and an arable,
U-shaped valley, undulating and deciduous;
a shell midden, and a stone circle
realized with ramp and pulley, not built to be visible;
and later still, *material*, modern, a quarry
for walls, roads and, now, a history of guided tours,
making a guest appearance in videos of gap years
with earphones and smoke and ring roads and glossy
primary coloured photos of strangers
and, here we are, on the cairn of stones with a pebble,
or taking something for the windowsill, maybe a seashell.

Grave Goods

Before he abandoned it to go horse-riding in Cuba
my brother sent me from Silicon Valley a postcard of Ishi
swimming in a creek in what used to be Yahi country
between the mountains and the ocean. He looks like America,
smiling, his hair as black as the river he swims in.
When I look for it, visiting that west coast for the first time,
I find the museum built around his life has been pulled down.
He'd worked there, after he burnt his hair in grief, as a cleaner
and warden.
Its anthropologists loaded his coffin with acorns, his bow, fire
sticks, venison
and his songs: of coyote, of vulture, of grasshopper and of
earthworm.

Bringing the Baby to Rossaveal

'If the real world is not altogether rejected'

— W B Yeats

The field is a limestone heat sink. A goat
and a pony stretch where stone walls meet.
The sea wind is head-high or, at the five-barred gate,
a passage we brave to the open pub. A wet May
and a dry June. The traffic. The roads. Not a cock of hay.
Goodbye to the first times, goodbye Galway.

Under adjoining, improvised trestles, folded into
her awkward car seat, the baby sleeps through
Germans to whom we speak French poorly,
the house red, a mug or two of coffee
and the sun making light of the menu.
Goodbye to the first times, goodbye Galway.

Pushing the squeaking buggy to the B&B
I overlook her quick enquiring glances at the moon
as I try to recall, going through security
with my shoes undone, what is stowed away
among recycled shopping bags in the undercarriage —
Goodbye to the first times, goodbye Galway —

a bottle, a banana, in this, the softest year and day
of living, anyway, our Lord, in the institution of marriage,
the sun at night, Galway under the volcano of dawn
we fly into, one time, with everything else at bay,
the baby squeaking, like the small wheel, the sun gone down.
Goodbye to the first times, goodbye Galway.