

Conor O'Callaghan

FICTION



Gallery Books

Fiction

is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 2 April 2005.

The Gallery Press

Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

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ISBN 1 85235 382 1 *paperback*
1 85235 383 X *clothbound*

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

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‘I have given here my own opinions and impressions, and I have no doubt my committee differs from some, but I know no other way of writing. We had all our points of view, though I can only remember one decision that was not unanimous. A member had to be out-voted because he wanted to substitute a harrier for a wolf-hound on the ground that the only occasion known to him when hare and wolf-hound met, the wolf-hound ran away. I am sorry that our meetings have come to an end, for we learned to like each other well.’

— W B Yeats, ‘The designing of Ireland’s coinage’,
The Coinage of Saorstát Éireann 1928
(The Controller, Stationery Office, Dublin 4)

Reception

Take this whatever way you will, and you will.
Earlier, when I stepped into my name being called,
the applause like hailstones on a felt roof,
the lull, my pre-rehearsed banal ‘Nice to be here’,
I couldn’t help wonder if you or some sad sap,
twiddling the tuner while a future dawn was breaking,
would pick me up in the drumbeats between stations.
Which made me think, swaying through the motions,
of a world visible to my dad from the chimney,
rotating the aerial inches and hanging on the word
— *No* — my brothers and me relayed back and forth
like a bucket of water splashed from hand to hand
to a barn gone up in smoke.

I tell a lie.

I overheard that over a glass of ropey Chianti
told by a bloke with a lisp the size of a pup
at the function of the wedding of your cousin,
and remembered the yarn so vividly and often
I took it to heart as part of my own past.
Who am I telling? You suffered it daily
in that hole where we were broke and green as barley.
The heat made Wimbledon a game of join-the-dots.
I’d sit there droning on about the Montreal Olympics,
my pissed father and the mysteries of a picture
that you and you alone could coax around.

Patron saint of sound and vision interference!
Uncrowned queen of tracking and rabbits’ ears!
Indulge me while I fill, if just this once,
the singular cup of corn that sentiment permits me.
What I would and wouldn’t give to have you with me,
here and now, though closer to what we were,

beside ourselves (no less) with love’s indifference,
that you might clarify how this finds me, nicely,
in the aftermath of thank-yous like a wake,
waiting in a three-star lobby on my lonesome
(so help me) to saunter any moment out to the cab
the Japanese brunette on the desk has called me
and the even greater unknown (for heaven’s sake)
of tonight’s canopy of satellites and nip in the air
a dope such as I can only hope to welcome.

Halogen

Our longest-running gag: I step up to your place,
trip the burglar light and cast myself as Withnail
playing the Dane to camera while you put on your face,
soliloquizing to letterboxes crammed with junk mail.

On a good night, I get about as far as the 'nor' of
... man delights not me; no, nor women neither...
when I ham up fluffing my lines or losing my nerve
until the gods begin to stir and the light to splutter.

If it were for real, and that were us, we'd be history
before the programme notes had dried. I'd be toast,
last heard of as the sidekick to an aardvark on kids' TV
or giving classes in transcendental theatre on the coast.

Alas, it isn't. I am here. The time is now. The flat is yours:
your bell, your breath, your prompter's snigger to my 'Yes'.

The Narrator

During the break in chapter
gets up to stretch beneath a skylight
and hears seagulls, small girls running.
So many pages since he listened last
that he can't recall how it came to this
or which wall the door was on
or even now what time of year it is.
Are his own pauses, he wants to ask aloud,
out there captivating someone else,
when an absent-minded 'Where was I?'
echoes through and he returns
to the place that you left off.