

Ciaran Carson

**FROM THERE
TO HERE**

Selected Poems and Translations



Gallery Books

From There to Here
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 9 October 2018.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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

© Ciaran Carson 2018

ISBN 978 1 91133 749 2 *paperback*
978 1 91133 750 8 *clothbound*

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

From There to Here receives financial assistance
from the Arts Councils of Ireland.



Contents

Colm Cille recited page 14

from *The New Estate and Other Poems* (1976, 1988)

The Insular Celts 15
The Bomb Disposal 17
Twine 18
Rubbish 19
Céilí 20
Soot 21
Dunne 22
Smithfield 24

from *The Irish for No* (1987)

Patchwork 25
Campaign 29
Cocktails 30
The Irish for No 31
Army 33
Belfast Confetti 34
Dresden 35
Clearance 40

from *Belfast Confetti* (1989)

Turn Again 41
Snow 42
Last Orders 44
Ambition 45
Yes 50
Bloody Hand 51
Hamlet 52
Night Out 56

from *First Language* (1993)

Switch 57
Second Language 58

Apparat 62
Drunk Boat 63
The Brain of Edward Carson 67
The Ballad of HMS *Belfast* 68
The Albatross 72

from *Opera Et Cetera* (1996)

A 73
D 74
G 75
H 76
K 77
O 78
Z 79
Me and My Cousin 80
Jacta Est Alea 81
Graecum Est: Non Legitur 82
Siege 83
Juliet 84
Kilo 85
Oscar 86
Romeo 87
X-Ray 88

from *The Alexandrine Plan* (1998)

The Sleeper in the Valley 89
On the Road 90
At the Sign of the Swan 91
The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire 92
Rainy Liaisons 93
Coexistences 94

from *The Twelfth of Never* (1998)

Adelaide Halt 95
The Blue Shamrock 96
Sayers, or, Both Saw Wonders 97
Spraying the Potatoes 98

1798 99
Heart of Oak 100
Banners 101
Finding the Ox 102
Green Tea 103
Twelfth Day 104
Spenser's Ireland 105
Planxty Miss Dickinson 106
The Display Case 107
The Ambassadors 108

from *Breaking News* (2003)

Belfast 109
Breaking 110
News 111
Gallipoli 112
Breath 114
Skip 115
War 116
Fragment 117
Sedan 118

from *For All We Know* (2008)

On the Contrary 121
Revolution 122
Birthright 123
The Shadow 124
Revolution 126
L'Air du Temps 127
Second Take 129
The Shadow 130
The Fetch 133
The Story of Madame Chevalier 134
Zugzwang 135

from *On the Night Watch* (2009)

From in Behind 136

Let Us Go Then 137
Watch 138
The Falling Leaves 139
Stumbling 140
The Blind Conning Tower 141
The Day Before 142
In Each Other's Eyes 143
Behind the Screen 144
In Whose Eyes 145
The Storm Without 146
For How Long 147
On Looking Through 148
Upon Seeing You 149

from *Until Before After* (2010)

It's the same 150
So it is 150
His last words 151
Leaning into 152
Whatever 152
We see 153
In your absence 154
Homecoming 154
If ever 155
Singled by 156
Which cloud 156
In the parlour 157
Five flights up 158
And 158
Backtracking on 159
As blade 160
As sharp 160
Centimetres 161
Time and 162
From a window ledge 162
The eye 163
Is abacus 164

The tag 164
Coming to 165
I wondered 166
As elsewhere is 166
I open the door 167

from *In the Light Of* (2012)

As I Roved Out 168
Fée 169
Snow 170
On the Road 171
What Goes Round 175

from *From Elsewhere* (2014)

Shoelace Tied 176
Out 177
Without Language 178
In Memory 179
The Burnt Island 180
Timing Device 181
The Rag 182
Sunset 183
Tragedy of the Times 184
Interlude 185
October Thoughts 186
Throwback 187
Without Courage 188
Translation 189
Transfixion 190
Transfiguration 191
Laced Boot 192
One Day When 193

Mannán mac Lir sang these verses 195

Int én bec . . . /The little bird . . . 197

Notes 199

Yes

I'm drinking in the 7-Up bottle-green eyes of the barmaid
On the *Enterprise* express — bottles and glasses clinking each
other —
When the train slows with a noise like *Schweppes* and halts just
outside Dundalk.
Not that unwontedly, since we're no strangers to the border
bomb.
As the Belfast accent of the tannoy tells us what is happening

I'm about to quote from Bashō's *The Narrow Road to the Deep
North* —
*Blossoming mushroom: from some unknown tree a leaf has stuck
to it* —
When it goes off and we're thrown out of kilter. My mouth
is full
Of broken glass and quinine as everything reverses South.

Bloody Hand

Your man, says the Man, *will walk into the bar like this* —
here his fingers
Mimic a pair of legs, one stiff at the knee — *so you'll know exactly
What to do*. He sticks a finger to his head. Pretend it's child's
play —
The hand might be a horse's mouth, a rabbit or a dog. Five
handclaps.
Walls have ears: the shadows you throw are the shadows you
try to throw off.

I snuffed out the candle between finger and thumb. Was
it the left hand
Hacked off at the wrist and thrown to the shores of Ulster?
Did Ulster
Exist? Or the Right Hand of God, saying *Stop* to this and
No to that?
My thumb is the hammer of a gun. The thumb goes up. The
thumb goes down.

Spraying the Potatoes

Knapsack-sprayer on my back, I marched the drills
Of blossoming potatoes — Kerr's Pinks in a frivelled blue,
The Arran Banners wearing white. July was due,
A haze of copper sulphate on the far-off hills.

The bronze noon air was drowsy, unguent as glue.
As I bent over the big oil-drum for a refill
I heard the axle-roll of a rut-locked tumbrel.
It might have come from God-knows-where, or out of the blue.

A verdant man was cuffed and shackled to its bed.
Fourteen troopers rode beside, all dressed in red.
It took them a minute to string him up from the oak tree.

I watched him swing in his Derry green for hours and hours,
His popping eyes of apoplectic liberty
That blindly scanned the blue and white potato flowers.

1798

I met her in the garden where the poppies grow,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
And her cheeks were like roses, or blood dropped on snow;
Her pallid lips were red with Papal Spanish wine.

Lulled in these wild flowers, with dance and delight,
I took my opportunity, and grasped her hand.
She then disclosed the eyelids of her second sight,
And prophesied that I'd forsake my native land.

Before I could protest she put her mouth to mine
And sucked the broken English from my Gaelic tongue.
She wound me in her briary arms of eglantine.

Two centuries have gone, yet she and I abide
Like emblems of a rebel song no longer sung,
Or snowy blossoms drifting down the mountainside.

As I Roved Out

after Arthur Rimbaud, 'Aube'

I embraced the summer dawn. All was still before
the palaces, their waters dead forevermore.

Shade after shadow lingered on the woodland road.
I woke quick, live, warm clouds of breath as on I strode.

Gemstones eyed my passing. Wings arose without sound.
My first adventure happened on a path I found

already littered with pale glints, wherein a flower
spoke her name to me. I blinked. It was no known hour.

I laughed to see the Wasserfall dishevelling itself
in shocks among the pines; climbing shelf by rocky shelf,

I recognized the goddess at the silvered peak.
Voilà! Veil after veil I lifted from her, not to speak

of how my arms were fluttering as I did so.
I did it in the lane. And boldly did I go

across the plain where I betrayed her to the cock.
She fled to the city under the steeple clock,

and beggar-like I tailed her on the marble quays.
Far up the road, beneath a grove of laurel trees,

I wound her in those recollected veils, and realized,
just a little, something of her massive shape and size.

Then dawn and child, finding themselves in the wood,
sank deep down into it. On waking it was noon.

Fée

after Arthur Rimbaud, 'Fairy'

All for Helen, ornamental oozing saps collogued
in virgin shadows: silent, unmoved, glittering the astral road.

Summer's torrid heat was given over to the mute birds,
inevitable languor to an expensive funeral barge

through winding estuaries of loves long dead;
and perfumes like an evanescent freshet overlaid

the chorus of the Timberwomen to the rumble
of the torrent through the ruined wood, from the cowbells

in the valleys echoing the long cries of the steppes;
all for Helen, bushy furs and shadows quivered, bee-skeps

oozed, the poor shivered, shimmering the celestial legends.
And her eyes, her dancing far superior to a thousand

precious dazzles coldly flowing in, or to the pleasure
of that unique décor, that one and only hour.