

From the



Irish Writers' Centre
Áras na Scríbhneoirí

Centre

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Michael Hartnett, 1941-1999

The news that Michael Hartnett has died will sadden many. He was one of our best, and certainly most beloved poets. If ever a poet fitted into most people's notion of a poet then it was Michael Hartnett with his dark eyes and delicate form, his aspect somewhere between gentleness and ferocity.

He was a powerful presence with his own distinct imagination and his own journey. From the starkly tender love poems to the powerful anger of "The Retreat of Ita Cagney" the range of the work is always impressive. At its core Hartnett's poetry is bleak, dark and lonely, informed by desolation and isolation, with hope placed in the artist's ability sometimes "to carve his own/face among the Gothic richness and the sky". The note of elegiac exhaustion was there from the start: the early poems look back to a rural Ireland defined by cultural decay and emotional barrenness, a small bare place, like that evoked by the poem which opens this book:

• All the perversions of the soul
I learnt on a small farm,
How to do the neighbours harm
By magic, how to hate.

These poems were written in a stripped language and with an essentialist stock



Michael Hartnett

of images – birds, old women, the poet and his craft. The country they inhabit is partly a recognisable rural Ireland but mainly a private terrain of loss, a temporal zone somewhere between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, haunted by the ghost of Irish, by the sense of a culture drained of what had made it vital and meaningful.

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Events

"The Book that Changed my Life",
Belfast writers at the IWC, poetry
readings and book launches. Details
of our events *Page 2*.

Poetry in UCD

Workshop with UCD Writer in
Residence Conor O'Callaghan
Page 3.

Competitions

Details of writing competitions.
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iwc@iol.ie

Are you on our mailing list?
Details, *Page 3*

Theatre workshop

Writing for theatre with
Marina Carr
Details, *Page 3*

Writer in Residence Announced

Earlier this year we were pleased to announce a partnership between Dublin Corporation, the Irish Writers Centre and the Arts Council to fund a new one year residency for a writer. At a reception in the Mansion House on the 9th of November (hence the lateness of this newsletter) the inaugural Dublin Corporation-Irish Writers' Centre Writer in Residence was announced by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Mary Freehill. The writer is Siobhán Parkinson, who has gained a substantial reputation as a writer for children



Siobhán Parkinson

and young people. Her first three books were aimed at the 6-9 age group. Her fourth book, *Amelia*, written for the age group tens through teens, was an immediate bestseller and was shortlisted for the 1994 Bisto Book of the Year Award. Siobhán went on to win this award in 1997 with a story of reluctant step-sisters, *Sisters...No Way*, published by The O'Brien Press and designed as two books in one, each telling the story from one of the sister's point of view. Siobhán will be working on new

fiction for both children and adults and running workshops in writing, the details of which will be announced later. A new novel for young adults, *Breaking the Wishbone*, also published by O'Brien, has just been published.

Writing for children and young people has enjoyed a remarkable flowering in Ireland in recent years and we're delighted to have been able to offer the first residency to one of its finest practitioners. This is, to our knowledge, the first time a children's writer has been appointed to a residency.

Siobhán will be based in the Dublin Corporation Arts Office next door to the Centre.

Michael Hartnett

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Hartnett patrols this terrain registering the loss with anger, as in "Visit to Croom, 1745":

I had walked a long time...
now to hear a Gaelic court
talk broken English of an English king.
It was a long way
to come for nothing.

The road that would take him to an adorning English is already mapped out in the early poems. His tone of voice, especially in the earlier poems, has a disconcertingly magisterial self-assurance, but often it is shattered by the end of the poem into something nervier, more hesitant, as in the progression from "I have exhausted the delighted range of small birds" to the painful breakages in the rest of that poem.

The gesture he proclaims in "A Farewell to English"—"I have come with meagre voice/ to court the language of my people"—even as it makes us wonder what people exactly alerts us to how Hartnett's formal, courtly gestures, his spare, proud rhetoric address an audience they themselves define, create. Precisely because it is so concerned to locate a sustaining homeland, it's a poetry, ultimately, of ferocious homelessness and restlessness.

His decision to write in Irish produced three collections, and these poems and his English versions of them appear in *A Necklace of Wrens* (1987). Michael Hartnett will of course be remembered also as a superb translator of the seventeenth century Irish poets Haicéad, O Bruadair and O Rathaille. His alignment with these three poets was born out of empathy with their predicament as poets who had seen their intended audience, the only one that mattered to them, their patrons, the taoisigh and their courts, crushed as a political and cultural force. Their ferocity, their homelessness, were also Michael Hartnett's. Here, for example, is the bleak yet defiant piece which closes Haicéad, "On hearing that it was ordered by the Irish clergy that a brother may not compose Gaelic poetry". His obeisance has all the humility of a punch in the jaw: "I will sew up my lips with plaited cross-stitching/ and not speak of their niggardly pettiness/ but I denounce this pack and their censoring/ and their hate, O God, for my fellow-countrymen."

We'll miss his wit, his gentleness and his anger.

(Michael Hartnett Memorial Reading, 14 November 8pm, Jury's, Ballsbridge, organised by Poetry Ireland)

Eithne Strong

Eithne, who died on the 24th of August, was a familiar and well-loved figure to members of the Irish Writers Union and to the staff of the Centre where she was a frequent visitor. Always generous with support and welcome for new writers and for new ideas, Eithne served on the IWU committee.

Born in Limerick, the poet grew up with a strong affinity for the Irish language, and for traditional Gaelic poetry. As a young woman she was an active member of the Irish language movement and her early published work appeared in Irish, in the journals *An Glór* and *Comhar*. Her first published book was a collection of poems in Irish. She was elected to *Aosdána* in 1996.

She and her husband, psychoanalyst and poet Rupert Strong, were founder-members of the *Runa Press*. Eithne wrote in both Irish and English throughout her life, her most recent collection (in Irish) being *Nobel* in 1998. She also published short fiction and novels. Her 1993 novel, *The Love Riddle*, is dedicated 'To Life', a sentiment that strikes anyone who knew her as particularly apt.

She is survived by nine children, many grandchildren and great grandchildren. She often said that life within a large and loving family was 'integral' to her writing. Eithne's energy, irreverent humour and ageless optimism were legendary and she will be sorely missed by her many friends as well as by her extended family.—Lia Mills (reprinted from the Irish Writers Union newsletter, *Final Draft*).

Sult cois Life

Bord na Gaeilge and *Radio na Life* invite anyone interested in Irish language events to a new Irish language club called *Sult* which has been running since late October. The club is held upstairs in the recently refurbished Castle Inn in Dublin's Christchurch area and there are two more sessions before Christmas, on Thursday 18 November and Thursday, 2 December.

Live music of different types features and the club is anchored by some of Dublin's leading musicians. Each night invited special guests perform and other musicians are welcome to join in. The club is open from 9 pm until closing time. There's a cover charge of €3/€2.

This informal, inclusive social club was in response to the demand in the city for Irish language events. It is aimed at Irish speakers, those learning the language and anyone interested in Irish music and culture. It offers learners an opportunity to practise their Irish in a relaxed atmosphere and more fluent speakers a chance to meet others with an interest in the language. All are welcome, including those who only have a few words of Irish or those who are simply interested in enjoying the atmosphere.

Eolas/information: (01) 706 8413, 706 8316, riomhphost: aillin.nichuair@ucd.ie

For information on competitions, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Irish Writers' Centre, 19 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

COMPETITIONS & JOURNALS

SALMON PUBLISHING FIRST POETRY MANUSCRIPT COMPETITION

Submissions are invited for the first annual Salmon Poetry Publication Award. This competition is for a first collection of poetry from an Irish writer, or Irish resident. Fee: £10. Prize: publication in *Autumn*, 2000, and 300 pounds advance royalties. The adjudicator is poet, critic and literary essayist Eamonn Wall, of Enniscorthy, Co Wexford and Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska. Further details from Jessie Lendennie at Salmon Publishing Ltd, Knockeven, Cliffs of Moher, Co. Clare, or by email at salpub@iol.ie, or Ph: 065 7081941

THE FINGAL SCRIBE

This year Spotlight on Skerries is accepting submissions from writers of plays. From these submissions, a core of writers will be invited to participate in the Skerries Arts Festival Writing Workshop. One Act stage plays may be entered. Entry Fee £5. Closing date: Friday 18th February 2000.

Further details from: Spotlight on Skerries, The Fingal Scribe, Skerries Community Centre, Dublin Road, Skerries, Co Dublin, or from the Irish Writers' Centre.

RTE MILLENNIUM MUSICIAN OF THE FUTURE FESTIVAL - POET OF THE FUTURE COMPETITION

The Competition is open to all poets born on or before December 6th 1980 but not before February 18th 1973.

Closing Date: Monday 6th December 1999.

Up to 6 Finalists will be chosen for the Poet of the Future Final, which will take place with the Composer of the Future Final in the John Field Room in the National Concert Hall on Friday 11th February 2000.

Further details and entry forms from: Jane Carty, Director, RTE Millennium Musician of the Future Festival, RTE, Donnybrook, Dublin 4.

FISH SHORT STORY COMPETITION

£1,000 for overall winner and other prizes, also top 15 stories will be published in *Fish's* 2000 anthology. Competition open to writers from all countries, but stories must be written in English. No restriction on theme or style. Maximum words 5,000. Closing date 30th November 1999. Entry Fee £8 for the first story, £5 per subsequent story.

Critique: for a fee of £10 per story a critique of approx. 250 words is available. Send SAE. Further details from *Fish Publishing*, Durrus, Bantry, Co Cork, Ireland. Ph: 027 61246, email: fishpublishing@tinet.ie.