

Augustus Young Poetry and Prose a regular webzine

No.2 September 2006
The New, The Recovered, The Political



Illustration 'The Nicotine Cat' by Paula Rego, created after Young's poem, included in the September issue of this site

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What Is This Site?

This is a regular magazine featuring the work of Augustus Young.

[Literary Wrangle](#)

Augustus Young was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1943, worked in London as an epidemiologist and adviser to health authorities, and now lives in France. Over the years he has published many scientific papers and numerous pieces of medical journalism.

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He is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently 'Lightning in Low Places' (Cranagh Press, University of Ulster 2000), and 'Days and Nights in Hendon' (Menard Press, 2002). The autofiction 'Light Years' (London Magazine Editions/ Menard Press 2002) was his first full length work in prose. Full details of all these works and how to order them are at <http://www.menardpress.co.uk/>

Numerous stories and poems have appeared over the years in anthologies and periodicals in Ireland, America and the UK ('Cyphers', 'Sniper Logic', 'Books Ireland', 'London Magazine', 'Hopscotch', 'Modern Poetry in Translation', 'Leviathan Quarterly', 'Arete' etc.

He is currently featured extensively in the international journal 'Ars Interpres' <http://arsint.com/>

Young has recently published 'Storytime' (Elliot and Thompson 2005), available from <http://www.elliottthompson.com/> This is a humorously satirical account of 'Augustus Young's' visit to Ireland to launch his book 'Light Years'. Acutely reflective about a culture in transition and the possibilities of survival, 'Augustus's' story is ultimately about two deaths, that of a culture and his own. But for 'AY', 'storytelling' ensures transition into an afterlife. 'AY', naturally, finds this reassuring both for the culture and himself.

Young has just completed 'Chronicling Myself', volume one of a trilogy 'Who Am I Talking to in My Head', and is also working on prose, poetry and light verse which draws on his nascent knowledge of the French language. Read more on this site.

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IN SEARCH OF LOST WORDS

In the 1970s my translations of 17th century Irish love poetry ('Danta Gradha') went into a second edition. A rare success. A few weeks ago I was asked to look over the draft of an anthology of danta gradha. My face dropped when I saw a poet famous for his modernist versions from the Irish had translated one of my own favourites. I did not like two lines. But decided to keep quiet until I had checked them with the scholars.

The lines in Irish are, 'Si ma stor/ Bean an ruisg uanine mar phor'. My rendition was 'She's my precious/ with eyes as green as grass is'. A compromise. The original lines were of the kind that lead the scholar Bergin to say to O'Rahilly, who deciphered the manuscript in the British Museum, 'You shouldn't publish material you don't understand'.

I received three replies. The first line was agreed. 'She's my treasure.' But the second came back as:

'A large rough woman seasoning seed.'

'An unattractive hag with green delusive eyes who clearly was not of the best stock.'

'Woman of the green eyes like the stalk of grass.'

A bit of a baggage was the majority view. So my rival poet's 'nature's accessory' must have been a reference to her handbag. Still I stood by mine, and the outcome was a draw. A lowclass schemer with agricultural skills. Or the girl with green eyes. The rest of the poem suggested that the loved one was nothing to write home about but the poet couldn't help himself.

I said nothing to the editor. A modernist version, given the uncertainties in the original, was justified. Here is my own:

She's my love,
who only gives me trouble;
although she has made me ill,
no woman serves me as well.

She's my dear,
who breaks me and doesn't care;
who yawns when I take my leave,
O she wouldn't grieve on my grave.

She's my precious,
with eyes as green as grass is;
who won't touch my bending head,
or take presents for caresses.

She's my secret,
not a word from her I get;
she's deaf to me as the skies,
and never lets our eyes meet.

She's my problem
(strange, how long death takes to come);
this woman won't come near me,

still I swear, she's my loved one.

[↑ Haut](#)

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FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW

[Literary Wrangle](#)Democracy is a means to an end.
It works well enough if you ethnic cleanse.

New Poems

[Word Sonnet](#)

GRACING MAILLOL'S HOUSE

[A Story](#)

Sarah's dress could cause another Trojan war. It has all the autumns of antiquity in its fabric. But she brings spring to it and peace. This is because at night sleep reweaves its pattern so she has something new to flow through through the day. Her parents gave it to her when art became her work, a work of art for a work of art.

[Iraq Adventure](#)[Irish Talk](#)[Recovered Poems](#)

This afternoon she is passing the afternoon in the house of Aristide Maillol, the sculptor, for whom the landscape moved to show his Venus to advantage. He wasn't much interested in clothes.

LOSING SIGHT

Old eyes you've seen enough of the harsh light.
So your tired lids droop and fall and the glare is off.
Now you're hooded and ready to take on the dark.
When children close their eyes they no longer exist.

OPEN HOUSE IN GOLDERS GREEN

Toasting the Torah

I open the door
and a wardrobe of rabbis
fall into my life.
And my life's not my own.I'm glad to be part of
such richness of garb,
the fullness of hair
which never stops growing.Where did they come from?
Don't ask, just accept it.
Their food smells of ages
of hunger sent packing.Where are they going?
Around in a circle.
The dance of the spiral.
It goes with their hair.Don't close the door on
the music they turn to.
It comes from the mouth
like the gossip of pleasure.What are they singing?
They're singing of circles,
a place in the centre

and women and children.

PRESENTS AND ABSENCES

Sarah from the Sahara
brought me back an oasis.
As I wanted a mirage
I sent her back to fetch one.

Her camel missed the desert,
and, stumbling on the ocean,
refused to walk on water.
He kneels down, and that is that.

So Sarah gave up and swam
as far as the horizon
would take her, and was last seen
backpacking in the outback.

FOR YOU, MY LOVE

Translated from Jacques Prevert

I went to the market for flowers
And I bought some flowers
For you
my love

I went to the market for birds
And I bought some birds
For you
my love

I went to the market for scrap
And I bought some chains
Some heavy chains
For you
my love

And then I went to the market for slaves
To search you out
But I couldn't find you
my love

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Word Sonnet

[What Is This Site?](#) MIRACLE STRIKE AT CANA

[Literary Wrangle](#) Christ Changed Water Into Wine At A Wedding And Wine Into His Body.

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Now
What
Happened
To
The
Children
Is
A
Miracle
Of
High
And
Mighty
Technology.

'When
they
ran
out
of
plastic
bags
they
wrapped
the
small
corpses
in
carpets.'

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DEAF EARS

When my friend Tony sent me a post card, saying Laura (Jackson) Riding, retired, but not retiring, poetess and ex-White Goddess, said 'Boadicea was more akin to Queen Maeve than to Brunnhilda', I sighed, for between the Tain Bo Cuailgne (the cattle raid of Cooley) in The Book of Dun (Irish eighth century) and Wagner's Ring Cycle (nineteenth century pre-Nazi kitsch kulture), that's an awful long way to go in one sentence, particularly since I know nothing about Boadicea, bar a medallion of her riding high into battle on a chariot spiked with knives, a heavyweight symbol of something or other, like the French Revolution's Marianne, she of the pointy cap and off-the-shoulder shrug, looking more like Judy Dench than Catherine Deneuve. And so I said nothing, except, 'Tony, she can't have meant Boudica by any chance?'

The conversation turned to dead poets and that amongst the recent spate of anniversaries to coincide with the publication of new old work, often with a compact disc, Laura Riding's fifteenth is due and someone should bring out her 'Rational Meaning: a new foundation for the definition of words'. Anyone who could give up poetry because she found it and Robert Graves 'inadequate' deserves to have her afterwork published.

Tony, who has a picky ear for mispronunciation, having moonlighted for twenty years in the UN instant translation unit, stopped me and said, 'I think we have coined a word. Anniversities, that's what you said. Anniversities, as in adverse or verse. Laura Riding was right when she said Irishmen couldn't spell'.

'Tell me more', I said, thinking, would it have been any different if I had written it down? 'I'm all ears.'

I received by return, 'In an article entitled 'The Idea of God'(1935) LR said that 'Misspelling is a common psychological feature among the Irish. I have known an educated Irishman to write 'teature' for 'teacher'. By the way, in your other query about my 'Wine from Two Glasses' did you mean 'Adorno' not 'Arno'?'

Wrong, Tony, I thought: in your 'The Same River Twice' I came across Adorno misprinted 'Adoro' and, as a pleasantry, I restored the 'n' and seggied the 'do' into an 'r' in honour of Dante's river. A lie of course, so I just thanked him for the quote.

The misspelling Riding gives is not a good example. No Irishman of my father's generation (and Robert Graves was his exact contemporary) would dare put a 'teat' in teacher. Respect for the master was a given (folk memory perhaps for the hedge days when they were called 'bannis', that is, outlaws). 'Teacher' was written on the blackboard to start the day. 'Who's that?' 'It's you, master' (in unison). 'Now how do you spell it?' 'T-e-a-c-h-e-r.' They may not have learned to spell many other words.

The bigger the vocabulary the worse the orthography. That was WB Yeats's excuse. Mine is false starts in five schools and a dislike of toffee. It stuck in my teeth. I could not spell until out of my blotched bildungskraft I took Turkish Delight in anatomical nomenclature. It was commonly believed to be derived from Latin and Greek, but Professor Mach said, no, Latin and Greek were derived from Irish. So I can spell levator labii

superioris allequi nasi, the smallest muscle of facial expression. It flexes when sneering (hit me on the nose if you dare) and decontracts for scorn (a motor economy responding to the frequency it is needed in life, according to Chateaubriand). I made a special study of it.

The study of visage composure reinforces racial stereotypes - the Englishman's stiff upper lip, the Frenchman's slack one and the locking of the Irish Irishman's, expressing, respectively, contempt, disdain and victim dead pan. History read in the face? I was a silly boy, Professor Mach said. 'It's like phrenology. You are creating masks for tribal wars. You'd be better employed learning to lip-read. Deaf people need to listen. And so do you.'

I am not sure I was listening.

What Is This Site?	A FEW VERSES ON THE IRAQ ADVENTURE, 2002 – 2003 Well, we now know who has weapons of mass destruction.
Literary Wrangle	BONNE BUSH
New Poems	In the days of dimpled chads, and unspeakable Floridas, a boil appears on his cheek. Band-aid couldn't camouflage what was bursting on mankind.
Word Sonnet	
A Story	
Iraq Adventure	
Irish Talk	Now waiting for him to speak, I can only see the hands with fingers like piranhas tearing at themselves until the skin breaks and knuckles shark.
Recovered Poems	Weapons of mass destruction can produce allergies in families predisposed to dropping bombs in the dark for democracy and oil.
	THE YELLOW VOMIT OF TEXAS
	Mankind is a pain in the ass. Step on the gas. Step on the gas. But with pollution it will pass eventually, eventually.
	The human race will outlive me.
	So I must bank on Baby Bush to give the world a drunken push. A button slipped on by a lush is a fit end to all this grief.
	God dammit, George, you falled asleep.
	NEWSREAL
	'Showing dead bodies on television is beyond the comprehension of anybody with an ounce of humanity in their souls.' Tony Blair, April 2003
	They have no respect for the dead. We who killed them seek to forget the necessary victims and shred evidence of their life and death.
	BUSHRANGER
	It's only when you think you won the war the real battle begins. You've gone too far ahead, and the dying around you grasp at your victor's boots and undo the clasp.
	You walk bare-footed through the clotting blood

The platelets are lilies, the serums flood
until you're stuck in the mud with victims
refusing to give up the ghost. 'What brings

you here?' Articulating skeletons
cry out, splinting broken bones with guns.
'To liberate you.' And they die again,
laughing this time. The winner says 'amen'.

THE LOGISTICS OF LOSS

In a city without light,
where the most reliable
source of water is in sweat,

it's no surprise manuscripts
lose their illumination,

and, with no shortage of oil
seepage from the earth and air,
fat-soluble, the dye dissolves

into the sump stream of death.

THE SECOND WEEK OF WIMBLEDON

Tim is still in and its strawberry weather.

All's right with the world.

Even the cricket is picking up. Flintoff
lost a stone and fires on all cylinders.

Bombers back from Iraq display their wings
of victory over Hyde Park. Great again.

'Come on', the nation cries on number one
where love's the bottom line. Game, set and match.
New Labour's power service is all aces.

All's right with the world.

WAVE

The deadly predictability
of bad news is what you expect
in the end.

I step out telling myself,
'You are alive. Forget the loose teeth
the sore back and the folies bergères
that you can no longer entertain.

You still pump blood into your extremities
and can twiddle your toes.

All things passing
pass. But don't forget to wave to yourself.

STATE OF THE WORLD

Now the unkindness of man gets more publicity,
and people buy it in economy packs for the freezer,
there's a smidgeon of consolation in reminding ourselves
that it was always thus, only the meat went off quicker.

Distribution has improved. We've moved from the fleamarket
to mail order atrocities (One click to basket.Two to buy).
The scale remains the same in proportion to population.
Still full knowledge at our fingertips makes it a mortal sin.

AFTERMATH

You bomb the shit out of the sewerage system
and fail to make those who doubted its wisdom
feel guilty and pay for its restoration.

Arses!

Cut the middle men out and shove the shit back
where it came from, charging a penny for a thought.
And I think they could just about break even.

Catharis!

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HOW THE IRISH TALK? (from 'The Hard and Soft Landing Chronicle')

[Literary Wrangle](#)

THE VOICES AROUND ME

[New Poems](#)

Since English has superceded Gaelic as the spoken tongue in Ireland, nothing much has changed in the native speech apparatus. The Irish have adapted English to their physiology and reproduced the Gaelic sound using a different lexicon. The Irishification of English has had a bifocal, vivifying effect on poets, dramatists and wits from Swift to Austin Clarke. The parochial is lifted into universality (comparisons with the insularity of most post-nineteenth century English English writing are embarrassing).

[Word Sonnet](#)[A Story](#)[Iraq Adventure](#)[Irish Talk](#)[Recovered Poems](#)

Later this hybrid released Beckett, who went on to experiment with a third language, French (achieving a cross between an Irish café and a wine so effervescent it evaporates before your eyes), and Joyce who, with a Babel of languages in 'Finnegan's Wake', created a whole brewery that will never run dry. But these polyglot masters are the luxury froth on the Guinness of the Celtic Twilight. The latter stout may now be dregs long gone stale, but it started out a heady brew that not only nourished students like Joyce (Beckett lived at home), but stiffened the resolve of tweedy idealists of the Gaelic League on exhausting bike rides into the country, in quest of the lost voice of the people.

A real conversation is underpinned by social norms, which decide in advance the result of the exchange before anyone opens their mouths, if they open them at all. The rhythms and syntax of unsaid things are lost in stage business. Shakespeare, four centuries before, listens to the rump of Shane (The Proud) O'Neill's disintegrating train of entertainers. Elizabeth had detained him in London beyond his resources (English diplomacy at its usual game) and the Stage Irishman was invented. Shane ended up in Gaelic grief, eating Gloriana's dust as though it was gold. While his bards went a-begging in the streets. Shakespeare has Pistol misquote one of their songs, 'Cailin o Chois Suire' ('A girl from beside the River Suir am I') in his mockery of the French prisoner Monsieur Fer's language. 'Je suis le gentilhomme de bonne qualité.' 'Cality! Calen o custure me.' We Irish find it difficult to make ourselves understood. Though the French prisoner fared no better, I suppose. 'O Seigneur Dieu' mistaken for his name. Pistol says, 'Then Seigneur Dieu is a gentleman'. Was God flattered?

When Irish English is spoken, the effect is a regression into Celtic solipsism, made worse by the fact it is in a tongue the people owe no allegiance to. The Irish are believed to be great talkers. Though eloquence, coherence of expression or oral poetry, is no more common than in any other culture. Notorious talkers would be more accurate. It is quantitative. The Irish just talk a lot, words, words, words. And in two languages. Gaelic and English. In contrast to the Finns (often a nation twinned with Ireland for cultural similarities - music, drinking and a tendency towards gloom), famously silent in two languages.

But in Ireland nobody really listens to anyone else. Recitatives in parallel are the lingua franca. As they echo across the sound barrier the only evident response is ricochet. The first example of this I recall was my mother reading us 'War and Peace' while not listening on the telephone to Auntie Mary O'Toole-Hogan's tales of family woe. Auntie Mary O'Toole was still talking when Tolstoy ran out.

Repartee occurs only when the parallels are breaking down. It usually portends trouble ('I'm talking to myself' and 'Who are you to talk'), for when communication has to be made the voice is forced to project to the other extreme from the usual half-heard patter. It is raised to a high pitch. Physiologically the native speech apparatus is not equipped for voice modulations. The two extremes are normal speech - almost beyond hearing except to the speaker, and abnormal speech - deadly in its audibility, better known as simply shouting.

Shouting is usually single-worded or the same word, more or less, repeated ad nauseam - tirades argued rhetorically are alien to the culture. It is deployed for the making of jokes or accusations or prayer (silent ones are not encouraged). That is, to start or end a night. What goes on between is not communication. But shouting is known to have the potential for causing trouble and is commonly avoided, except at historical moments. The softly spoken 'for yourself alone' modus endures like Dilsey ('The Sound and the Fury'). In Ireland, as long as nobody knows what the other is saying, peace is maintained.

Gaelic and its bastard tongue, Irish English, are languages inherently inhospitable to deaf people. Lip reading is impossible. This has gone unnoticed until recent years, when immigration outnumbered emigration for the first time since the seventeenth century, and prosperity has internationalised issues for concern, particularly on television and at popular public events. A smidgeon of this change from indifference to minimal public recognition might well be due to indigenous residual guilt for being deaf to one another. (French is so different. The hands and shoulders communicating with those who can't quite hear the words, or the right ones. I for one am grateful.)

As I preferred not to talk, it was hard to know whether I had learned to read or not. Silence was associated with ignorance, rather than some sort of spiritual decorum. I was sent to a doctor who said boredom made me mentally lazy. My father took to teaching me in his bed. I was propped up on a pillow beside him before 'Timothy Tomithy', a rhyming book with illustrations. We read through it while my younger brother prodded me with a compass from under the bed. One day my father lost patience with my hesitant progress and Michael jumped up from behind the bed and recited the whole story. 'Timothy Tomithy Timothy Top,/ He could not walk he could only hop.' I disappeared with my shame into a voluptuous silence. (I asked Michael for the words of 'Timothy Tomithy' recently and he said, 'I never heard of it'.)

HOW I LEARNED TO READ?

My eldest sister, who aged six raised her big blue eyes from 'Oliver Twist' and said, 'Isn't it terrible about poor Nancy?', sixty years later sits on a high chair chez moi in Bras de Vendres and sings 'Timothy Tomithy', the song that taught me to read when I was nine:

'Timothy Tomithy Timothy Top,
He could not walk he could only hop.
He hopped through the fields and down the lane,
He hopped through the woods and back again.

He hopped one day to London Zoo
And saw inside a kangaroo.
The kangaroo with a spring and a plop
Said, 'Here is a boy that can only hop.
He hops on one leg, I hop on two.

I must show him the way the kangaroos do'.

Timothy hopped like a kangaroo,
Hop hop hop like kangaroos do,
then all at once he began to run
and was home again at set of sun.'

She has not changed (I was minus one when she was reading Dickens),
or Timothy Tomithy.

[↑ Haut](#)

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[What Is This Site?](#)[Literary Wrangle](#)[New Poems](#)[Word Sonnet](#)[A Story](#)[Iraq Adventure](#)[Irish Talk](#)[Recovered Poems](#)**THE BALLAD OF THE UNCLEAN CHILD**

from Brecht

'The Quarryman', 1959, James Hogan junior
(my first published poem)

Once there was a brat
who washed himself in grease
before being given a bath,
and did whatever he pleased.

One holiday the king
up seven flights (by lift)
came with his court to bring
honour to where brat lived.

Brat's mother, overwrought,
panicked around the place
looking for a clean cloth
to wipe his dirty face.

But not a rag was clean.
The whole visit was wrecked.
The king left in a steam.
What could the child expect?

COMERFORD'S ARMADAGalway, August 1588
'Niagra' 1975

...other news there is none
but great fear in these parts:
princes rising from the sea
with bags of sovereigns on their backs
spilling themselves over the rocks

and the locals look on helpless
till the storm quiets down; then they assemble
chains of corpses on the beach
stripping them of gold and other valuables
and any alive they slay in terror

lest they be moved to give them shelter
and end up like the foolish
O Rourke on top of a spike.

DROWNED MAN RAN FROM FIRE'... a verdict... that death was due to dawning...',
'Irish Times', February 1973
'Honest Ulsterman', 1974**The Facts**

He tore up the floorboards
of the house he was building:
poured paraffin on the polystyrene
walls, opened the windows, and before

the fit came on, he struck a match
 on the fretwork and lit the blow-
 lamp and up went the bungalow
 in rampant flames. He lifted the latch

once out, collapsed: the crazy pavement
 was a swastika, stricken limbs
 ecstasied by the litterbin.
 And when the epilepsy was spent,

overalls smoking, he ran on
 out across the reclaimed land, shouting,
 'I've burnt it, I've burnt it', and flung
 himself into the River Shannon.

The Inquest

By fire and water this here corpsed
 Prometheus left wrenches and pliers,
 plane and vice, behind in the fire
 to melt amorphous or be warped.

He was apprentice to these tools.
 When fired, they worked themselves, molten
 for him, God's foreman, in freedom
 for a moment: shapeless noodles

now: though the house is built. But he
 was observed by Garda Lavin
 who was relieving himself in
 the ditch and recovered the body.

from MR THACKERAY ON CORK

A verse translation of William Makepeace Thackeray's 'Irish Sketch
 Book', 1843
 'Poets of Munster: An Anthology' edited by Sean Dunne, Anvil Press
 Poetry, 1985

POPULAR CONDITIONS

Though picturesque, Coalmarket Street
 is quite another world indeed:
 tatterdemalion stalls with clothes
 (the castoff wardrobes of scarecrows):
 where shawlie women in spirehats
 brew poteens from the innards of rats
 while giving suck to scabrous babies
 and beating off dogs with rabies.

Here wide boys bide the time of day
 in long tailed coats of hoddin-grey,
 corduroy breeches, and shod in shoes
 that raise a mighty dust; in their twos
 flourishing donnybrook sticks. Crime
 keeps the police out. The dying
 are dragged to Half Moon Street and pegged
 to the railings and there anointed.

Two minutes away, the Grand Parade

enjoys a different kind of trade:
 in smart arcades, no bustle,
 perfumed goods brought to skirt rustle,
 lackeys and landaus, all the show
 of wealth, in fact. While a stone's throw
 would open up a human sewer,
 the pandemonium of the poor.

Still charity has not a hope.
 A beggar lad to whom I spoke
 told me, he'd rather rape and steal
 from his mother than be wheeled
 into a job - shipped in shackles
 to the Welsh mines, breaking one's back till
 home means the workhouse - I've my pride.
 Hell is to die on the other side.

It's wise to stay on. Not a bad
 place to be jailed in, or go mad.
 The Asylum's clean, has a good name
 for its happy clinking of chains.
 Healthier in than out. Lose your mind
 and they'll mind your body. You'll find
 inmates daily get milk and bread
 and a safe place to lay their head.
 The County Jail is better still,
 a haven for the criminal,
 with solid walls and solid meals:
 the authorities don't want Bastilles.
 And where malefactors are concerned,
 they give them what cannot be earned
 honestly - hunger is the norm
 in this town: too many are born.

THEOBALD MATHEW (TEMPERANCE LEADER)

The ladies love him: this good priest,
 stoutly handsome, with not the least
 trace of draconian demeanour
 expected of a Temperance weaner.
 No 'small beer'. Almost a Whig. Views
 moderate. A listener, who'd choose
 common-sense. Not given to preach.
 We had tea with him (one cup each).

THE URSULINE CONVENT (A PERSONAL VIEW)

The Best Families (on the decline)
 put daughters in the Ursuline
 Convent. So how could I refuse
 an invite there, despite my views.
 On the drive, blossoming-potatoes,
 'La Violette' on two pianos
 greet me - it's the young ladies who
 are schooled there for a London debut.

The hallbell responds to my touch:
 chords crash; and, in hardly as much
 as a quaver-rest, playing resumes,
 though more subdued, in distant rooms
 Grand Pianos everywhere. More

life here than a broth... The door
opens. A nun ushers me in,
not meeting my eye, for fear of sin,

a conspiracy between us
(O Naples Bay when Vesuvius
erupts). Hush-hush to the parlour.
There a vegetable odour
seeps. And unearthly bad taste too:
expensive canvases, brand new,
framed in brocade... I don't feel well.
The abbess shows me to the chapel

where postulants peek behind grilles,
disturbed in prayer. Nuns make me feel
uneasy. Draped in shapeless sheets,
how do they move - it can't be feet.
Not as other women, whose life
gives life: death has them as a wife...
I had to leave: to breathe the air
of Monkstown across the river.