

MAIO 2025
com SUSAN HOY

POESIA AO MEIO DIA

em homenagem a PAUL DURCAN



fflch USP

The WB Yeats Shopping Centre

By Paul Durcan

*This morning I visited the W. B. Yeats Shopping Centre
For the first time in my tiny little life.
Although it was built thirteen years ago
I was averse to conferring on it my carbon footprint.*

*I revelled in it.
How W. B. Yeats also would have revelled in it;
A vast, Babylonian, Celtic Tiger ziggurat
Of so many storeys, so many malls
With millions of women, young and old,
Behind the open-plan counters and stand-alone
checkouts
But scarcely a single customer –
Scarcely a single consumer except for myself!*

*And these millions of women, young and old –
Not only were they seriously glamorous
But they were seriously attentive,
Helpful, thoughtful, courteous even!
I spent two hours
Skipping up and down the escalators,
Crooning 'Hug A Shady Wet Nun',
Mooching about,
Pretending to be a customer
And asking advice and getting it –
But, of course, not purchasing anything.*

*Oh, Pasha, but I've been so –
So solo, so to speak –
For the last seven years –
But two hours in the W. B. Yeats Shopping Centre
And I am a new soul!
Poleaxed with adrenalin!
'Revitalised,' as Mrs George Yeats might murmur.
I say to myself:
In the name of Mrs George Yeats –
The most virtuoso housewife who ever lived –
I must purchase something!
I could feel W. B. Yeats egging me on:
He was intoning: 'Obey your urge.'*

*So, in The House of Harun Al-Rashid,
In the Luggage Department,
I purchased a suitcase with wheels.
Medium-size. Scarlet-red. Toilet-trained. Guaranteed.
The Cleopatra-like woman
At the checkout batted her eyelashes
And, purring, snapped: '70 per cent off.'
I could see that she considered me
An astute – as well as comely – male consumer.
I sauntered out of her Luggage Department
Talking to my brand-new, scarlet-red suitcase on
wheels
As if it were my own dog – an Irish wolfhound –
I'd owned for donkey's years.*

*I cried out to the first passer-by on the street:
'I am a bare-breasted warrior of Erin!'
She – for she also was a she –
We were no longer in Armenia –
(Are the men of Ireland
All up on top of Mount Ararat
Hiding under their motor cars?)
She whispered back to me:
'Where'd you pick up your fancy luggage, Mister?'
I peered down the wells of her eyes,
Dropping my brown pennies down into them:
'In the W. B. Yeats Shopping Centre.'
She stopped in her tracks and stared at me:
'Thank you, sir!' – she screamed at me – 'Thank you,
sir!'*

*In the outdoor car park of the W. B. Yeats Shopping Centre
I sat down under a recycling bin and wept – wept for joy and ecstasy and grief and anguish and
the whole jing bang lot and Moses and Isabel Gilsenan and Johannes Scotus Eriugena and
Georgie Hyde-Lees and Eimear McBride and Robert Heffernan and Katie Taylor and Christine
Dwyer Hickey and Mo Farah and Roisin O'Brien and Joe Canning and Máire Logue and Rory
and Columbanus and Enda and Fionnuala and Jorge Mario Bergoglio and Michael D. Higgins
and – and – and – and – and – and – and – and – SABINA!*

Sport

by Paul Durcan

*There were not many fields
in which you had hopes for me
but sport was one of them.
On my twenty-first birthday
I was selected to play
for Grangegorman Mental Hospital
in an away game
against Mullingar Mental Hospital.
I was a patient
in B Wing.
You drove all the way down,
fifty miles,
to Mullingar to stand
on the sidelines and observe me.
I was fearful I would let down
not only my team but you.
It was Gaelic football.
I was selected as goalkeeper.
There were big country men
on the Mullingar Mental Hospital team,
men with gapped teeth, red faces,
oily, frizzy hair, bushy eyebrows.
Their full forward line
were over six foot tall
fifteen stone in weight.
All three of them, I was informed,
cases of schizophrenia.
There was a rumour
that their centre-half forward
was an alcoholic solicitor
who, in a lounge bar misunderstanding,
had castrated his best friend
but that he had no memory of it.
He had meant well – it was said.
His best friend had to emigrate
to Nigeria.*

To my surprise,
I did not flinch in the goals.
I made three or four spectacular saves,
diving full stretch to turn
a certain goal around the corner,
leaping high to tip another certain goal
over the bar for a point.
It was my knowing
that you were standing on the sideline
that gave me the necessary motivation –
that will to die
that is as essential to sportsmen as to artists.
More than anybody it was you
I wanted to mesmerise, and after the game –
Grangegorman Mental Hospital
having defeated Mullingar Mental Hospital
by 14 Goals and 38 points to 3 goals and 10 points –
sniffing your approval, you shook hands with me.
'Well played, son'.
I may not have been mesmeric
but I had not been mediocre.
In your eyes I had achieved something at last.
On my twenty-first birthday I had played on a winning team
the Grangegorman Mental Hospital team.
Seldom if ever again in your eyes
was I to rise to these heights.

The 12 O’Clock Mass, Roundstone, County Galway, 28 July 2002

by Paul Durcan

*On Sunday 28th of July 2002 –
The summer it rained almost every day –
In rain we strolled down the road
To the church on the hill overlooking the sea.
I had been told to expect “a fast Mass”.
Twenty minutes. A piece of information
Which disconcerted me.
Out onto the altar hurried
A short, plump priest in late middle age
With a horn of silver hair,
In green chasuble billowing
Like a poncho or a caftan over
White surplice and a pair
Of Reeboks – mammoth trainers.
He whizzed along,
Saying the readings himself as well as the Gospel;
Yet he spoke with conviction and with clarity;
His every action an action
Of what looked like effortless concentration;
Like Tiger Woods on top of his form.
His brief homily concluded with a solemn request.
To the congregation he gravely announced:
“I want each of you to pray for a special intention,
A very special intention.
I want each of you – in the sanctity of your souls –
To pray that, in the All-Ireland
Championship hurling quarter-final this afternoon in Croke Park,
Clare will beat Galway.”
The congregation splashed into laughter
And the church became a place of effortless prayer.
He whizzed through the Consecration
As if the Consecration was something
That occurs at every moment of the day and night;
As if betrayal and the overcoming of betrayal
Were an every-minute occurrence.*

*As if the Consecration were the “now”
In the “now” of the Hail Mary prayer:
“Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.”
At the Sign of the Peace he again went sombre
As he instructed the congregation:
“I want each of you to turn around and say to each other:
‘You are beautiful.’”
The congregation was flabbergasted, but everyone fluttered
And swung around and uttered that extraordinary phrase:
“You are beautiful.”
I shook hands with at least five strangers,
Two men and three women, to each of them saying:
“You are beautiful.” And they to me:
“You are beautiful.”
At the end of Mass, exactly twenty-one minutes,
The priest advised: “Go now and enjoy yourselves
For that is what God made you to do –
To go out there and enjoy yourselves
And to pray that, in the All-Ireland
Championship hurling quarter-final between Clare and Galway
In Croke Park, Clare will win.”
After Mass, the rain had drained away
Into a tide of sunlight on which we sailed out
To St Macdara’s Island and dipped our sails –
Both of us smiling, radiant sinners.
In a game of pure delight, Clare beat Galway by one point:
Clare 1 goal and 17 points, Galway 19 points.
“Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.”*

Why should a foolish marriage vow

by Paul Durcan

*Dear Nessa – Now that our marriage is over
I would like you to know that, if I could put back the clock
Fifteen years to the cold March day of our wedding,
I would wed you again and, if that marriage also broke,
I would wed you yet again and, if it a third time broke,
Wed you again, and again, and again, and again, and again:
If you would have me which, of course, you would not.
For, even you – in spite of your patience and your innocence
(Strange characteristics in an age such as our own)
– Even you require to shake off the addiction of romantic love
And seek, instead, the herbal remedy of a sane affection
In which are mixed in profuse and fair proportion
Loverliness, brotherliness, fatherliness:
A sane man could not espouse a more faithful friend than you.*

Tullynoe: Tête-à-Tête in the Parish Priest's Parlour

*Ah, he was a grand man.”
“He was: he fell out of the train going to Sligo.”
“He did: he thought he was going to the lavatory.”
“He did: in fact he stepped out of the rear door of the train.”
“He did: God, he must have got an awful fright.”
“He did: he saw that it wasn't the lavatory at all.”
“He did: he saw that it was the railway tracks going away from him.”
“He did: I wonder if...but he was a grand man.”
“He was: he had the most expensive Toyota you can buy.”
“He had: well, it was only beautiful.”
“It was: he used to have an Audi.”
“He had: as a matter of fact he used to have two Audis.”
“He had: and then he had an Avenger.”
“He had: and then he had a Volvo.”
“He had: in the beginning he had a lot of Volksses.”
“He had: he was a great man for the Volksses.”
“He was: did he once have an Escort?”
“He had not: he had a son a doctor.”
“He had: and he had a Morris Minor too.”
“He had: he had a sister a hairdresser in Kilmallock.”
“He had: he had another sister a hairdresser in Ballybunion.”
“He had: he was put in a coffin which was put in his father's cart.”
“He was: his lady wife sat on top of the coffin driving the donkey.”
“She did: Ah, but he was a grand man.”
“He was: he was a grand man...”
“Good night, Father.”
“Good night, Mary.”*

'Windfall', 8 Parnell Hill, Cork

by Paul Durcan

*But, then, at the end of day I could always say -
Well, now, I am going home.
I felt elected, steeped, sovereign to be able to say -
I am going home.
When I was at home I liked to stay at home;
At home I stayed at home for weeks;
At home I used sit in a winged chair by the window
Overlooking the river and the factory chimneys,
The electricity power station and the car assembly works,
The fleets of trawlers and the pilot tugs,
Dreaming that life is a dream which is real,
The river a reflection of itself in its own waters,
Goya sketching Goya among the smokey mirrors.
The industrial vista was my Mont Sainte-Victoire.
While my children sat on my knees watching TV
Their mother, my wife, reclined on the couch
Knitting a bright-coloured scarf, drinking a cup of black coffee,
Smoking a cigarette - one of her own roll-ups.
I closed my eyes and breathed in and breathed out.*

*It is ecstasy to breathe if you are at home in the world.
What a windfall! A home of our own!
Our neighbours' houses had names like 'Con Amore',
'Sans Souci', 'Pacelli', 'Montini', 'Homesville'.
But we called our home 'Windfall'.
'Windfall', 8 Parnell Hill, Cork.
In the gut of my head coursed the leaf of tranquility
Which I dreamed was known only to Buddhist Monks
In lotus monasteries high up in the Hindu Kush.
Down here in the dark depths of Ireland,
Below sea level in the city of Cork,
In a city as intimate and homicidal as Little Marseilles,
In a country where all children of the nation
Are not cherished equally
And where the best go homeless, while the worst
Erect block-house palaces - self-regardingly ugly -
Having a home of your own can give to a family
A chance in a lifetime to transcend death.*

Raymond of the Rooftops

by Paul Durcan

*The morning after the night
The roof flew off the house
And our sleeping children narrowly missed
Being decapitated by falling slates,
I asked my husband if he would
Help me put back the roof:
But no – he was too busy at his work
Writing for a women's magazine in London
An Irish fairytale called Raymond of the Rooftops.
Will you have a heart, woman – he bellowed –
Can't you see I am up to my eyes and ears in work,
Breaking my neck to finish Raymond of the Rooftops,
Fighting against time to finish Raymond of the Rooftops,
Putting everything I have got into Raymond of the Rooftops?*

Isn't it well for him? Everything he has got!

*All I wanted him to do was to stand
For an hour, maybe two hours, three at the most,
At the bottom of the stepladder
And hand me up slates while I slated the roof:
but no – once again I was proving to be the insensitive,
Thoughtless, feckless even, wife of the artist.
There was I up to my fat, raw knees in rainwater
Worrying him about the hole in our roof
While he was up to his neck in Raymond of the Rooftops.
Will you have a heart, woman – he bellowed –
Can't you see I am up to my eyes and ears in work,
Breaking my neck to finish Raymond of the Rooftops,
Fighting against time to finish Raymond of the Rooftops,
Putting everything I have got into Raymond of the Rooftops?*

Isn't it well for him? Everything he has got!

The Geography of Elizabeth Bishop

by Paul Durcan

*There is a life before birth
On earth – oh, yes, on earth –
And is called Brazil
Call it paradise, if you will.*

*Reared in New England, Nova Scotia
I was orphaned in childhood.
Despite the fastidiousness of aunts
I could know myself only as an alien –
An authority of courtesy –
Until aged forty on a voyage round Cape Horn
I stepped off in Rio, stayed, discovered
My mind in Brazil. Became again an infanta!
A thinking monkey's companero!
Fed, cuddled, above all needed.
In the treetops of Samambaia
I made a treehouse;*

*In Ouro Preto I made a nest
In a niche in a cliff in a valley
Of nineteen golden churches.
At forty I discovered that my voice –
That cuckoo hymen of mine, mine, mine –
Was a Darwinian tissue:
That in God's cinéma vérité
I was an authentic bocadinho.*

*Back in Boston, a late-middle-aged lady,
I became again an orphan,
Put an orphan uniform.
Endured the timetable of the orphanage –
All these invigilators sliding
In and out their Venetian blinds
With not a baby elephant in sight
Nor chimp not toucan not parakeet.
I stilled the pain with alcohol
And with self-pity – in spite
Of which, death waxed merciful.*

*There is a life before birth
On earth – oh, yes, on earth –
And is called Brazil
Call it paradise, if you will.*

In the Days Before Rock'N'Roll

Van Morrison & Paul Durcan



fflch USP