

Molly Twomey

Jim Crickard

spoken worlds
southern syllables



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Jim Crickard

poems from two Cork-based poets

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or for those of the bardic persuasion

‘le gach bó a buinín agus le gach leabhar a chóip’
(to each cow its calf and to every book its copy)
- *Diarmuid, 6th C. High King*

editing / typesetting by Paul Casey



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Foreword

The chapbook *southern syllables* is the fifth edition in Ó Bhéal's *spoken worlds* series, featuring ten poems each from poets Molly Twomey and Jim Crickard, two rising stars both on the local Cork poetry scene as well as nationally. This edition celebrates the 2020 Twin Cities poetry exchange between Cork and Coventry.

It follows *exhaling ink*, *sound as character*, *lost in print* and *paper incantations*, which featured the work of Cork poets Shaunna Lee Lynch, Benjamin Burns, Ali Bracken, Michelle Delea, Ciarán MacArtain, Stanley Notte, Rab Urquhart and Julie Field.

This is the first time the exchange has been confined within the realms of the virtual, with online readings and zoom visits to the Lord Mayors from each city. We are delighted to be able to continue the exchange despite the physical limitations of our time. The book is also available in eBook format from the Ó Bhéal website.

2020 is the 11th year of poetry exchanges between Coventry and Cork. The quality and vibrancy of the poetry, including that of Coventry poets Matt Black and Emilie Lauren Jones, is *as high as ever*, a testament to both the resilience of the exchange and to our hard-working partners across the sea, the reigns this year having been taken up by twinning alumnus and *Fire and Dust* organiser/poet Raef Boylan. Since 2009, Ó Bhéal has co-managed the exchange with a relay of invested partners in Coventry (Cork's very first twin city). These selfless, cultural ambassadors include John Morley of Heaventree Press (& Night Blue Fruit), Antony Owen, Adam Steiner and now Raef Boylan.

Acknowledgment is due to the city councils of both Cork and Coventry for their ongoing support as we continue to drive and develop this invaluable exchange for its benefits to poets and writing communities from both cities. Since 2008, the exchanges have been documented across a series of collective reviews by the participating poets. These can be viewed on the Ó Bhéal website at www.obheal.ie.

I hope you enjoy these

Paul Casey
Director
Ó Bhéal

Molly Twomey

Molly Twomey

Fionnuala

My friends get matching piercings,
sip Smirnoff on roof top bars,
while I push a double buggy,
cut jam sandwiches into hearts.

Maybe, I shouldn't have called
dad's rebound a hag.
But, God, how she glared at the twins,
stuck a pin in Conn's bum,
spat on Fiachra's rusk.

I was subtle at first,
glued her *Marie Claire* together,
deleted photos of Dad off her iPad,
put her mini on DoneDeal,
convinced her pasta was gluten-free.

But when she caught me
scrubbing Fiachra's potty
with her pink toothbrush,
she said *goodbye, good luck, I've had enough.*

I didn't hear the wallop she gave the back door,
the curse she hissed under her tongue.
I was shut in the bathroom,
pulling the last of her hair from mam's brush.

Molly Twomey

Cassandra

At the edge of the River Lee,
I preach at suits, kids, clouds of nicotine.

Gannets will break their necks,
diving for sardines that no longer exist,

river rats will decompose by thin plastic bags,
otters will take their medicine back.

Nobody remembers the grating creek
of the corncake, the howl of the wolf.

Soon, Gaia will unfurl her long hair,
burnt and brittle from chlorine, peroxides,

and pick the lice that have itched her skin,
crack them between each fingernail.

Molly Twomey

Cilka

They let her keep her hair.

She copies consonant after vowel; Gabriella, Kristof, Markéta...

She smells them before she sees them; Belomorkanol and pork spread.
Their faces a shore of stubble, their rifles over elk shoulders.

They drag her down the red hall of dead men's portraits,
the shadows of her smock trail behind her.

A four-cornered room: poster bed, dresser, lamp, chair
and the senior commandment tapping his calf with a swagger stick,
licking his teeth.

She twists her wrist to the brass handle to be whacked by a rattan strap.
Thick fingers imprint bruises like starbursts on her arm.

He stretches into an X and she sees the weekends:
squeezing armbands on her *chlapček*, lapping up his jam scent.

*Did his own matka take him to the seaside on Sunday afternoons,
cut the crust off his beef sandwich, strap his sun-creamed body into a booster
seat?*

She lugs his bullet-proof jacket off, singlet, chest hair,
belt click-click-clicking.

Molly Twomey

Massage

She switches on the cd and soaks her fingers in rapeseed oil. He removes his shirt and lays on the table. She dims the lights. Applying pressure to his sacral, her hips move to the motion of her shoulders. She closes her eyes, imagines kneading dough for her two boys, their gapped smiles, runny noses.

The man grunts and she is back. She moves up to his lungs and presses in, like he is a bottle of ketchup. He wheezes as she compresses. She wants to squeeze until he can no longer breathe, wants his organs to come out his lips. She will hang them in her hostel like ornaments. He slaps her thigh as if to say, that's enough. And she returns to this man, the clock on the wall, the life she was told to run towards.

Molly Twomey

Dearly Departed

Babe, since you'll kill yourself if I leave,
could you rip out your veins?
I need a new ring.

Throw your body into the Lee,
so I can sail on your back under Mary Elmes's bridge.
Pretend I'm in Venice and it's thirty degrees.

Can I keep your Nike sweater, the grey one,
it looks so good on me. What about your red
blood cells? You know I'm anaemic.

I'll sip them in a martini,
your eyeballs floating like two salty olives.
At your funeral,

do you want me to sing?
The Pretty Reckless or Taylor Swift.
I'll pretend to be you, clinging

to a bottle of gin, dribbling,
I'm sorry, I love you, don't leave,
as if this isn't the fourth time

you've stopped me with a butter knife,
the empty packet of your mother's pills,
claiming you don't need therapy,

and didn't mean to sleep with her.
It was just a symptom of this week's
disorder on DiagnoseMe.ie.

Listen, I am going shopping for a veil,
a little black dress, I've left a knife, a rope,
a litre of petrol and a lighter in the shed.

Molly Twomey

As Light

When my mother finds a pale white feather,
she palms her chest. Her eyelids fall
like the light cotton of prayer flags in Tibet.

For years she pulled locks of my hair,
like dead wrens cleaving
to pillows, nesting in clothes.

She held worry like a worm in her throat
as she handed me over to GPs,
therapists, DXA scans and ECGs.

She lays the feather on the windowsill,
messy and soft as the new growth
at my occipital bone.

Molly Twomey

Spring

Spring is your ex
showing up to your father's funeral
with an Aldi bouquet.

You rip it up, one of the few things
you're allowed to touch. You don't care
that it won't rain on the pallbearer

that the coffin will ease into soft fertile earth.
Heat is a fever, pollen is a curse,
a stranger tucks in your father's shirt.

Molly Twomey

The Dishwasher

I watch my father lose his father.
Toast crunched, tea drunk,
we unload the dishwasher.

Crouched by him, I gather
serving spoons with silver tongues,
he is losing his father.

Stacking things in order,
flasks at the back, China cups in front.
I pull out the bottom drawer.

A puddle of water,
shaped like a lung.
Black tar in his father.

He wonders why it isn't stronger,
are the wires overstrung?
I shut the door of the dishwasher.

Honestly, why bother?
With every crumb, our effort undone.
Father pays to drain his father,
I scatter salt in the dishwasher.

Molly Twomey

Zip It

We ask you to kindly halt
leaving your parkas and jackets
to warm the homeless

for we cannot have tourists
distracted from their whiskey
lattes and *Aran* jumpers.

They'll stop taking selfies,
we'll have nothing left
to post on Lovin Dublin.

We have given your coats
to Oxfam for students
to buy, resell, repay their loans.

Your woollen hats and mittens
are a real congestion issue.
People are bumping

into each other like scabies
on a child's elbow.

If they really want a home,

they'd apply for the HAP
scheme on their iPhones.
Look, we can't build more shelters

or estates, we just gave 23 million
to a rafting course; kayaking,
water polo. We don't mind

stags and hens pissing
down Camden Place, snorting
coke off Molly Malone's tits.

At least they're not setting up
tents like whack-a-moles
outside the church,

making it hard to stomach
our tuna melts. Feeling guilt
when we tuck in

the bathed skin of our children
under plastic moons
and glow-in-the-dark stars.

Molly Twomey

Crumbling

The receptionist glares at Áine's
streak of snot on your sleeve.
You get no welcome pack,
no map of the city. Her eyes roll

at your council bag of fifties.
She counts them three times,
swipes her counterfeit pen.
Áine is dragging you now,

wants her animal crackers
in the bottom of the case,
the case that holds your life.
She is crying, stomping, shrieking,

you can't sign the document,
Jesus Christ. The receptionist thinks
you can't handle your child.
You yell at her, plead with her,

she doesn't know what it's like
to change a nappy on the side
of the road, to eat dry Rice
Krispies for lunch, to spit blood

cause you can't afford a toothbrush.
All you want is a table and chairs
so Áine can dip crunchy soldiers
in boiled eggs. Heaters to hang

damp socks on and a shower
to clean city grease off your skin.
A bed with fresh linen to sleep
and sleep until you can't remember

the woman who held her purse
a little tighter, the guard who kicked
you off the steps of the church,
this receptionist tut tut tutting.

Molly Twomey



Molly Twomey holds a BA in English Literature and MA in Creative Writing from University College Cork where she received the title of College Scholar. From 2017 to 2019 she was an editor for UCC's literary journal, *The Quarryman*, and a trainee editor for *Southword* in 2020. She has been published in *Poetry Ireland*, *Banshee*, *the Irish Times*, *Crannóg*, and elsewhere, with work forthcoming in the *Ireland Chair of Poetry Commemorative Anthology*. In 2018, she won The New Voices section in The Voices of War Competition, UCD. In 2019, she won the Padraic Colum Poetry Prize, was runner-up in The Waterford Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for Over the Edge's New Writer of the Year Award in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Selected for Words Ireland's National Mentoring Programme 2020, she is currently under the guidance of Grace Wells.

Jim Crickard

Jim Crickard

Straight Pride

Every shade of beige will be draped around Boston,
'Don't Stop Believing' and 'Summer of 69' blaring from floats,
grown men dressed in Buzz Lightyear costumes,
straight women can leave their gay best friends in a play pen,
every colour of the rainbow blended into a terrible brown,
and they'll wave that great brown flag around
and shout their message aggressively:
"We're here! Not queer! Get used to it!"

Vanilla ice-cream, Ted Talks on the missionary position,
female impersonators impersonated by females,
outdoor screenings of the Titanic, Goat Yoga, avocado toast,
every movie starring Tom Cruise, and khaki pants.

LGBT Activists will get accused of being Westboro Baptists
for picketing Straight Pride with signs that read:
"When was it illegal for men and women to get married?"
"When did a straight person get jailed for being straight?"
"When did a straight person get put to death for being straight?"

Oh, repressed majority, how have you coped these last ten years?
Are you mad because we've taken rainbows away from My Little Pony?

Jim Crickard

Hen Party in The George

Be careful around the corners, don't make eye-contact at the bar,
watch out for the mom, she's on safari, in search of exotic birds.
For a parrot to echo her punchlines, or maybe a cockatoo,
she's prowling around the cocktail lounge, she looking for me and you.

The mother of the bride uses her lazy-eye to her advantage,
edging into a group of faces with meandering conversation.
Now blocking their exit, unsure who she's addressing,
talking about her gay hairdresser, *how great he is with the scissors.*

"I've never had a problem with the gays now myself" she says,
pausing to sip from a pink plastic penis, pausing for praise.
One by one, the gays fly south, migrating to the bar,
to the dance floor, to South-Africa if necessary.
"Snobs" she calls em, "them gays are awful touchy."

She gasps when she sees the black crow drag queen
stalking her long legs across the stage, seven foot tall,
the silver crown of feathers refracting light off the disco-ball.
"Jesus" she says, stealing the microphone: "you're looking better than me"
"I should feckin hope so" the drag queen says "you're twice me bleedin' age!"

Slowly, slowly, the hen party has pissed off all of the George...
Abandoning punctured plastic husbands all over the stage.
Flashing so many cameras it feels like E.T.'s family has landed.
A gathering parliament of lesbians encircles the hens,
a murder of goths fly down from the V.I.P. lounge.
I wonder if they've seen Hitchcock's movie: 'The Birds.'

Jim Crickard

Queenie of the Damned

We repose by the stove, my fingers glide through her black fur
the room glows orange with warmth, she purrs like a sensuous engine.
I begin thinking about the cobra-mimicry of my black cat
in serpentine pursuit of a lone shrew in the midnight fields,
the silver curlicue of her tail above blades of grass
bending heavy with moon-dew that pours off the sky by the bathful.

How the shrew carries the feeling of predacious green eyes
floating through the night, that vampiric masquerade of luxurious fur
dissolving into nightfall, the widening jaws of night
flash a brilliance of white teeth, hailing into the skin, the sinew.
The theatrical thrill of blood! And with hours left in the night
she lets the wounded shrew escape from left paw to right.

When our handful of black fur returns from the murder fields
she sits by the backdoor, her convex eyes reflecting the kitchen light.
I see the pink of her miniature mouth crying to come inside.
Hypnotized by those pools of Ancient Egyptian jade,
I open the door, and she pounces soundlessly into the kitchen.

Jim Crickard

On Being a Vampiress

As the velvet cloak slides off my bone white skin
my reflection is reduced to two orbs of silicone floating,
Hollywood's best. With this strange and naked effacement
I find myself obsessed. Like Narcissus, peering into the reaches,
forever searching for himself. I do not see my face in the levitating lakes
but can see the imprints of my fingers when I touch myself.

Nightfall. Blood moon. The sky aches with menstrual light
spilling on the city of glass and chrome, burning an orange glow.
I follow the scent of flesh, wearing my finest burgundy silks,
the colour of a bruise. I walk through telecom estates,
call-centres offer easy prey. Night shifts, insufferable customers
they almost look relieved in blood spattered headsets.

When I bring my final victim before the mirror
he's still entranced by the rapid flashes of my golden eyes,
like the seizure-inducing cartoons they banned in Japan.
Reflected — bouncing, bobbing — these aqueous foreign objects
the blood inside my digestive system still visible in the mirror
like watercolour snakes, floating, rising, falling...
my vermillion crystal guts, my silicone twins.

As the dawn breaks in a slow spill of Lucozade
loneliness fills my coffin. I fall asleep to the sounds
of garbage-men reversing, window shutters, pedestrians.
Whilst my body follows its cycle of turning to dust,
leaving silicone resting on the apex of my remains,
I listen to the bird song of a world going on without me.

Jim Crickard

Customer Service Shogun

I strategise my way through the call
like Sun Tzu in The Art of War

Evading the outraged enemy
with the stealth of politeness

feigning weakness to entice my foe
to strike complaints like gun-fire.

When they have destroyed my decoy
and feel the arrogance of false win

I have them right where I want them:
The Gorilla has entered my temper trap

beating their chest about how we
charged an extra forty cent this quarter.

Undetectable as night, I pounce above
a barrage of Donkey Kong barrels

and rise higher than the heavens
to throw the onus like an atomic bomb

down on the customer. Obliterating
them with our terms and conditions.

Supreme victory is subduing
the enemy without fighting.

Jim Crickard

A Queen Trying to Survive His Teens

I was born May 6th, 1992.
Homosexuality was legalised in 1993.
I guess that means I was an illegal baby.
You know what they say about gays,
always needing an entrance.

The law changed but people didn't.
By age twelve I knew well how to behave.
I studied the hand movements of men:
steady ships tied down by the their hips
when they sat, how they sailed to the bay of their lap.
Whereas mine were pink Barbie boats
zipping around in conversation, gesticulating.
As I sat with my hands, clasped on my lap,
they became a bone-china basin, held by rubber wrists.
And so, I turned them into ships.

Each morning, in the bathroom: the “boy machine.”
The black bathroom-mat, a conveyer belt, carried me
along a line of Lynx cans spraying gas from their steel eyes
A comb slick with Dax Wax moved over and back, over and back
Until I emerged: glossy, packaged, believable.

I befriended some boys, the soccer kind
said I supported Arsenal to survive.
When really, I was watching Desperate Housewives
but I'd deny my love for that show,
three times before the cock crowed.
Their approval was my air.

When I turned sixteen, I tasted the word “fabulous” on my tongue.
That sparkling, ridiculous word, like a cherry cocktail
splashed around in conversations, announcing who I was,
I flew a flag and hilarious girls encircled me protectively:
their little gay president.
We laughed so hard together, moving as one,
wall to wall in the school halls, an untouchable circle.

Jim Crickard

Own Your Roots

Before I say what I'm about to say,
I will need signatures on these NDA's.
I'm trusting you with a disclosure,
risking an image I've carefully doctored.
My deep dark secret is —
I am from Kerry.

I know, it's shocking. Hard to believe.
I carry bag with all of my discarded parts:
the Healy-Raes...muttering about drink-driving
and denying climate-change
in his own words "Sure, god will find a way!"
But those brothers know how to whip votes —
promising to fix potholes — Kerry's form of activism.
I remember my Grandmother getting political at dinner:
"JU' KNOW DE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
A BOX OF FAGS AND 'DE ROADS?
YOU'LL FIND TAR IN 'DE FAGS!"

...As I was saying, I carry a bag
with all of my discarded parts.
I have fine tuned my accent
clean as NewBridge silverware
around the neck of Anne Doyle
wielding an accent clean as cut glass.
I don't fumble out words with extra h's or r's
or squish sentences under a fork.
Every word is spoken to be heard.
Now and then, whilst having brunch
tracing my finger around the rim of
honey-nut, nougat-fudge craft beer,
I'll excuse myself for the "Tie-let,"
slipping on my Kerry Gold lies,
I am flat on my arse with a novena
of cows, chickens and Healy Raes
Flying out of the bag and there's

mud on my glossy shoes.

As I lay splayed in my social faux-pas,
with hoof prints all over my sophistication
I begin to think about the wilds of my land,
I am the landscape, a man of elements,
a blessing and a curse. Wild eyed, celtic,
fairy-fort, Queen Meadhbh laying splayed,
shale under my left eye, limestone palms,
spring water tears. I feel I am beautiful...
Monsieur cartographer,
Draw me like one of your French borders.

Build a quarry into my heart and you will find
the chasms of loving Kerry people. Drill into
my bellybutton to find fairy-forts and caves,
Cross me or my fairies and we'll bog burst
the worst soil creep nightmares all over your dreams.

Jim Crickard

Alien Queen

Alien Queen resting inside the hive,
slick with fluid, that black and phallic head.

Violence comes naturally as motherhood
spreading your webs, that tangled poison.

Won't you wrap me up hand and foot,
and leave me to your larvae?

How I crave the edge of your danger,
helpless in your webs,

waiting for Ellen Ripley to scale
through this corrugated city

to unwrap me and set your nest ablaze.
How sorely I want that showdown

Ripley manoeuvring that metal forklift,
screaming: "Get away from her, you bitch!"

Alien Queen, when you fall through that Airlock
Please know I will follow you and you

can plunge your claws into my ribcage,
as we freeze in the black starry ether

and float, eyes locked together,
slow dancing the universe forever.

Jim Crickard

Pet Cemetery

in memory of Queenie

Like the Egyptians, I shave off my eyebrows
and bow down to mourn my dead cat.

Beneath the night sky, diffused by her helix eyes,
I cradle her body and walk the streets,

tears running down my face, smooth as cement
featureless, flattened to an oval.

A crowd of people are celebrating the Rose of Tralee,
still weeping, still cradling my dead cat, I join them.

As fireworks scratch across the midnight black
perhaps she's clawing at the cat flap of the underworld,
when thunder breaks, she's knocking plates in heaven.

Jim Crickard

Wake Up

Nothing grows between the L or O,
Nothing breathes between the V or E.
The word falls out of your mouth
laying there, lifeless as a limp balloon.
In time, it will fizzle away like spittle
lost in the gloss of the table cloth.

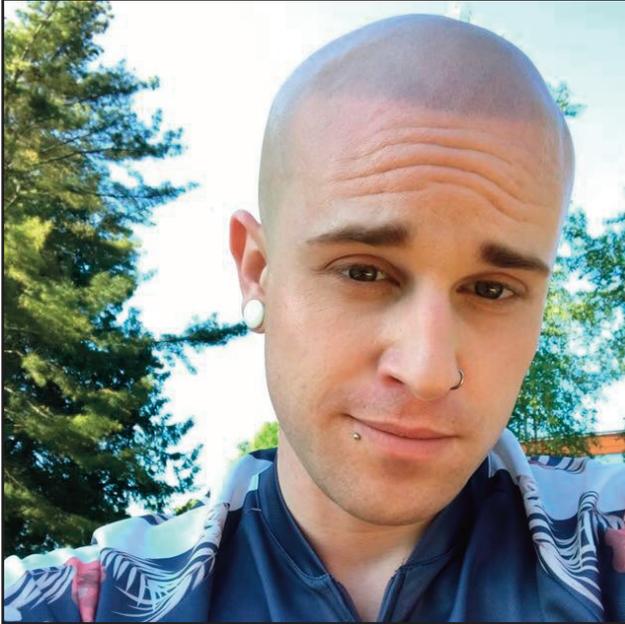
L O V E banished from your vocabulary,
like ionic bonds in the letters repelled.
You always had a science mind
"no time for magic" you'd say.
I can hear the oceans of your soul,
despite all of that poker face decorum.
You know that in the aftermath of pain
and the roar of stormy cry
sea shells still speckle the shore,
bright as pearls at midnight.

Do you know where I came from?
Where you came from?
Where this all started?
We were eyeless in a mermaids purse,
nestled in the underworld, in ocean caves,
Where the left foot lays against a beating heart
and the right foot, blindly, kicks in the dark.

Luna emerged and died nine times,
bore us through by the axis of her darkness,
deplored on to a silver shore of childhood.
In the fissure of a moment, one smack
and air clouded into our lungs, first breath.
Nestled in the chest of sacred mothers,
never knew of this world,
never knew of each other.

Somehow, our rivers have changed course.
I see you've built a dam on yours.
I can hear your ocean roars.
You always had a science mind,
so you would definitely know
that oceans cannot be confined.

Jim Crickard



Jim Crickard 's poetry is camp, entertaining work that explores culture, sexuality and identity. In 2019 he was selected by Poetry Ireland for the inaugural *Versify* series, and performed to a sold out show at Dublin Fringe. In the 2019 All Ireland Poetry Slam Final he made it to 2nd place. In 2018, he won the Cuir Spoken Word Platform and was awarded a slot in Electric Picnic. He was shortlisted for the 2018 Ó Bhéal International Five Words Competition, and his work has been published in *Automatic Pilot*, *A New Ulster*, and *Contemporary Poetry*.

“Dramatic, sharp, alert to the intense energy of relationships and the pity of our urban fringes, Molly Twomey’s voice is new and striking and modern. The heartless narrator of ‘Dearly Departed,’ the cold, exasperated receptionist in ‘Crumbling’ or the drifting, rejected mother of ‘Fionnula’ are focal points in a very contemporary odyssey. She is a poet of spare language and great emotional depth, a poet of DXA scans and ECGs, a lyricist of The Pretty Reckless or Taylor Swift who teaches us to ‘sleep until you can’t remember.’ Here is a poet for a new Ireland, for a new post-Covid world.”

- Thomas McCarthy

“I have seen James described as a poet who writes in a camp, entertaining style, in fact he has said as much himself. He also performs his poetry in drag under the name Venus Envy. All well and good. But James is first and foremost a poet and in this chapbook he shows himself to be a fine poet. His imagination is exciting and expansive and his humour is rich and well-judged. On a portentous note, as a poet of an earlier generation, I sometimes wonder if the generation of emerging poets are ready to take on the burden of creativity that we have borne. I have no worries on that front as long as poets like James Crickard are breaking through. Write on James, as a performer and a writer you will have no bother in keeping the flame lit.”

- Gerry Murphy



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