

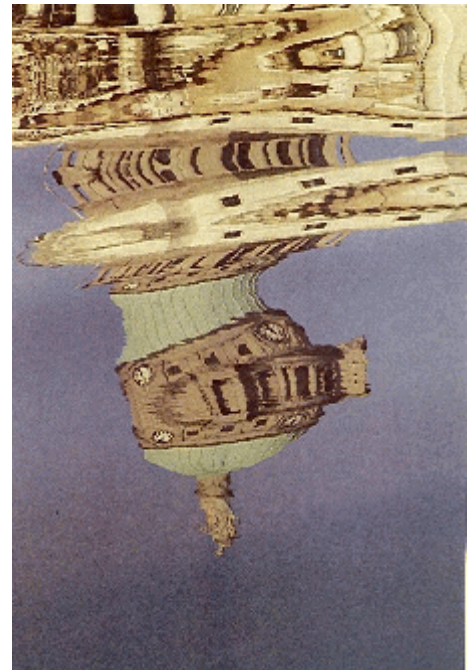
Irish Literature at GCSE - SEG  
English 2400  
English Literature 2495

# Crossing the Irish Sea

*Literary traditions in poetry*

By

**Tim Kershaw**



Customs House, Dublin, reflected in the river Liffey

'Ireland in Schools'  
*for*  
The Warrington Project

SU24

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Irish Literature at GCSE - SEG  
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# **Crossing the Irish Sea**

*A. An anthology*

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# Introduction for teachers

**This study unit on contemporary Irish poetry is designed to address the coursework elements of GCSE SEG English 2400P, 2400M and 2400X and English Literature syllabus 2495R, 2495T and 2495X.**

**However, it may readily be used in all centres as an effective way of addressing the National Curriculum and teaching students to appreciate and enjoy poetry. It may be used in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 5, as well as Key Stage 4.**

**The unit was originally developed and tested by Gillian Goetzee and her students at South Wirral High School. It has been adapted for SEG, developed and tested by Tim Kershaw and his year 10 class at Calday Grange Grammar School. As the students' assignments show, the unit proved a resounding success, both in encouraging an informed interest in poetry and in promoting knowledge and understanding of Ireland.**

## CONTENTS

**The unit consists of the three parts: an anthology of poetry; a students' activity book; and examples of students' work. The poetry is drawn largely from contemporary Irish writers but earlier writers from Ireland and England have been included to illustrate the development and continuation of literary tradition.**

## USING THE STUDY UNIT

**The students' activity booklet is intended to be a guide rather than rigidly followed.**

**The introduction to the culture of Ireland may be approached in a variety of ways. It may be the skeleton of a teacher-centred discussion, to be extended by the teacher's own knowledge and experience. The discussion points at the end of each section may be the prompts for a written response or for class or group discussion. The introduction has been included in the activity booklet as a reference for students as they respond to the tasks on the individual poems or to the summative assignments.**

**It is envisaged that teachers will use a few of the poems for whole class teaching to provide a model for the depth of appreciation required.**

**The students will then negotiate their own assignments and appropriate poems. Individuals, pairs or groups may work on the assignments. This will ensure differentiation and a more interesting personal response.**

**The students should work on the tasks for individual poems first, and then modify and use this to build an assignment.**

## DELIVERING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

**The study unit of work fulfils many of the requirements of the National Curriculum, Key Stage 4.**

Attainment target 1: speaking and listening

**The study unit contains tasks on individual poems. These tasks should be performed through class, group and pairs discussion as well as through writing, providing students with opportunities for ‘exploration and hypothesis’, ‘consideration of literature’, ‘the development of thinking’ and ‘analysis’ through talk.**

Attainment target 2: reading

**The study unit gives students opportunities to develop the ‘range of literature’ they read and to ‘study some texts in detail’. It encourages them to ‘read more demanding texts’ and gives them ‘access to significant authors’ including those prescribed in section (d). The poems ‘feature a range of forms, and styles’, ‘draw on literary traditions’, ‘extend students’ ideas and their moral and emotional understanding’ and ‘use language in imaginative, precise and original ways’.**

**The unit also fulfils the requirement that ‘students should read texts from other cultures and traditions that represent their distinctive voices and forms, and offer varied perspective and subject matter’.**

Attainment target 3: writing

**The tasks on individual poems and the summative assignments enables students to develop through ‘review, analysis, hypothesis.... and summary’ and to inform others through ‘explanation, argument.’**

## **COURSEWORK**

SEG GCSE English Literature Syllabus 2495

**The study unit is particularly appropriate for the coursework elements of SEG GCSE English Literature Syllabus 2495. The syllabus requires that of the three pieces of coursework: one must ‘demonstrate an understanding of literary tradition’; a second must ‘demonstrate an appreciation of social and historical influences and cultural contexts’; and a third must ‘explore relationships and comparisons between texts’.**

**The explanation of the poems will lead to assignments which may be chosen for coursework. Coursework provides 30 per cent of the final assessment.**

English 2400

**For English 2400, students are required to make a written response to ‘at least one author published before 1900 from those specified in paragraph 1 (d) of the Reading programme of study’ and to ‘one major author with a well-established critical reputation whose work was published after 1900.’**

**Coursework provides 40 per cent of the final assessment (20 per cent spoken; 20 per cent written).**

**These requirements will be served particularly well by the study of Irish poetry, written by poets experiencing a unique culture, history and literary tradition. The English poetry included by Auden, Gray and Wordsworth convincingly illustrates the literary traditions that link both sides of the Irish Sea.**

# 1. A Tourist Comments on the Land of his Forefathers

Take Dublin for instance:

What is it anyway?

You walk across O'Connell Bridge

little kids begging - gives the place atmosphere;

ya look around through a flea bitten crowd

and wonder why they stay here.

Their cousins in Milwaukee write,

saying COME ON OVER - WE'LL FIX YA UP.

But no, it's safer going to ceilis and mass,

please Goding and making themselves believe that

Grafton Street is elegant & an ice cream cone

in summer is high adventure.

As for me, I got some great shots of the place

and as soon as I get back to the U.S. of A.

I'll put them right where they belong:

first in the projector shining on our living room wall

and then in a bright yellow kodak box

next to all the others in my sock drawer

No offence meant.

Julie O'Callaghan

## 2. The House

**My grandfather was so frail  
that when bloothered  
after a Saturday session  
in the bookies and McConville's  
I could lift him with one hand  
and carry him  
like a raincoat over my arm,  
and just as easily hang him  
against the side of the house  
until I found his keys.**

**It's neither here nor there  
why he drank.  
Suffice to say when Violet died  
he couldn't look  
at another woman.  
He'd got a little house  
of his own, and sat all night  
footering with the coals.  
In that house  
he couldn't look at another bottle.**

Howard Wright

### 3. My Father Perceived as a Vision of St Francis

It was the piebald horse in next door's garden  
frightened me out of a dream  
with her dawn whinny. I was back  
in the boxroom of the house,  
my brother's room now,  
full of ties and sweaters and secrets.  
Bottles chinked on the doorstep,  
the first bus pulled up to the stop.  
The rest of the house slept  
except for my father. I heard  
him rake the ash from the grate,  
plug in the kettle, hum a snatch of a tune.  
Then he unlocked the back door  
and stepped out into the garden.

Autumn was nearly done, the first frost  
whitened the slates of the estate.  
He was older than I had reckoned,  
his hair completely silver,  
and for the first time I saw the stoop  
of his shoulder, saw that  
his leg was stiff. What's he at?  
So early and still stars in the west?

They came then: birds  
of every size, shape, colour; they came  
from the hedges and shrubs,  
from eaves and garden sheds,  
from the industrial estate, outlying fields,  
from Dubber Cross they came  
and the ditches of the North Road.  
The garden was a pandemonium  
when my father threw up his hands  
and tossed the crumbs to the air. The sun  
cleared O'Reilly's chimney  
and he was suddenly radiant,  
a perfect vision of St Francis,  
made whole, made young again,  
in a Finglas garden.

Paula Meehan

## 4. The Pattern

Little has come down to me of hers,  
a sewing machine, a wedding band,  
a clutch of photos, the sting of her hand  
across my face in one of our wars

when we had grown bitter and apart.  
Some say that's the fate of the eldest daughter.  
I wish now she'd lasted till after  
I'd grown up. We might have made a new start

as women without tags like *mother, wife,*  
*sister, daughter,* taken our chances from there.  
At forty-two she headed for god knows where.  
I've never gone back to visit her grave.



First she'd scrub the floor with Sunlight soap,  
an armreach at a time. When her knees grew sore  
she'd break for a cup of tea, then start again  
at the door with lavender polish. The smell  
would percolate back through the flat to us,  
her brood banished to the bedroom.

And as she buffed the wax to a high shine  
did she catch her own face coming clear?  
Did she net a glimmer of her true self?  
Did her mirror tell what mine tells me?  
I know her shrug and go on  
knowing history has brought her to her knees.

She'd call us in and let us skate around  
in our socks. We'd grow solemn as planets  
in an intricate orbit about her.



She's bending over crimson cloth,  
the younger kids are long in bed.

Late summer, cold enough for a fire,  
she works by fading light  
to remake an old dress for me.  
It's first day back at school tomorrow.



‘Pure lambswool. Plenty of wear in it yet.  
You know I wore this when I went out with your Da.  
I was supposed to be down in a friend's house,  
your Granda caught us at the corner.  
He dragged me in by the hair - it was long as yours then -  
in front of the whole street.  
He called your Da every name under the sun,  
cornerboy, lout; I needn't tell you  
what he called me. He shoved my whole head  
under the kitchen tap, took a scrubbing brush  
and carbolic soap and ice-cold water he scrubbed  
every spick of lipstick and mascara off my face.  
Christ but he was a right tyrant, your Granda.  
It'll be over my dead body anyone harms a hair  
of your head.’



She must have stayed up half the night  
to finish the dress. I found it airing at the fire,  
three new copybooks on the table and a bright  
bronze nib, St. Christopher strung on a silver wire,  
  
as if I were embarking on a perilous journey  
to uncharted realms. I wore that dress  
with little grace. To me it spelt poverty,  
the stigma of the second hand. I grew enough to pass  
  
it on by Christmas to the next in line. I was sizing  
up the world beyond out flat patch by patch  
daily after school, and fitting each surprising  
city street to city square to diamond. I'd watch  
  
the Liffey for hours pulsing to the sea  
and the coming and going of ships,

certain that one day it would carry me  
to Zanzibar, Bombay, the Land of the Ethiops.



There's a photo of her taken in the Phoenix Park  
alone on a bench surrounded by roses  
as if she had been born to formal gardens.  
She stares out as if unaware  
that any human hand held the camera, wrapped  
entirely in her own shadow, the world beyond her  
already a dream, already lost. She's  
eight months pregnant. Her last child.



Her steel needles sparked and clacked,  
the only other sound a settling coal  
or her sporadic mutter  
at a hard part in the pattern.  
She favoured sensible shades:  
Moss Green, Mustard, Beige.

I dreamt a robe of a colour  
so pure it became a word.

Sometimes I'd have to kneel  
an hour before her by the fire,  
a skein around my outstretched hands,  
while she rolled wool into balls.  
If I swam like a kite too high  
amongst the shadows on the ceiling  
or flew like a fish in the pools  
of pulsing light, she'd reel me firmly  
home, she'd land me at her knees.

Tongues of flame in her dark eyes,  
she'd say, 'One of these days I must  
teach you to follow a pattern.'

Paula Meehan

## 5. The Dowsers and the Child

When you were leaving  
I always asked if you'd  
brought an umbrella;  
you made me think of rain  
upon the hills. All our lives

there was a steady drizzle between us;  
the sound of water in the distance.  
Your hands, your eyes  
dowsed over me, as if you  
could divine things deep within me.

It seemed to me you moved beneath  
a grey cloud. I remember  
even on sunny days, you wore  
a great wide hat, your eyes  
in darkness under the cool verandah.

Some days you were a passing shower.  
Some days you were a snowflake.  
Some days your tongue was a bolt  
of lightning that sent me  
scuttling under the kitchen table.

Hours I'd sit there, listening  
to the thunder of your things  
rolling in the distance.  
Nights when the wind blew,  
I could hear it moan in your room,  
creaking the bed. If I opened your door,  
you blew it shut with a shout.  
Once when I was lost in the forest  
at the back of our house, I followed  
the cold wind that led home to you.

I ran down the path to embrace you,  
but you stayed distant like all my  
rainbows, and told me, and told me,  
and told me, not to touch your  
delicate colours with mucky hands.

Tony Curtis

## 6. Going Home to Mayo, Winter, 1949

Leaving behind us the alien, foreign city of Dublin,  
My father drove through the night in an old Ford Anglia,  
His five-year old son in the seat beside him,  
The rexine seat of red leatherette,  
and a yellow moon peered in through the windscreen.  
'Daddy, Daddy,' I cried, 'pass out the moon,'  
But no matter how hard he drove he could not pass  
out the moon.

Each town we passed through was another milestone  
And their names were magic passwords into eternity:  
Kilcock, Kinnegad, Strokestown, Elphin,  
Tarmonbarry, Tulsk, Ballayhaderreen, Ballavary;  
Now we were in Mayo and the next step was Turlough,  
The village of Turlough in the heartland of Mayo  
and my father's mother's house, all oil lamps and women,  
and my bedroom over the public bar below,  
and in the morning cattle cries and cock crows:  
Life's seemingly seamless garment gorgeously rent  
By their screeched and bellowings. And in the evenings  
I walked with my father in the high grass down by  
the river.  
Talking with him - an unheard of thing in the city.

But home was not home and the moon could be no more out-flanked  
Than the daylight nightmare of Dublin City:  
Back down along the canal we chugged into the city  
and each lock gate tolled our mutual doom;  
and railings and parkings and asphalt and traffic lights,  
and blocks after blocks of so-called 'new' tenements -  
Thousands of crosses of loneliness planted  
In the narrowing grave of the life of the father;  
In the wide, wide cemetery of the boy's childhood.

Paul Durcan

## 7. The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage

When I was sixteen I met a dark girl;  
Her dark hair was darker because her smile was so bright;  
She was the girl with the keys to Pearse's Cottage;  
And her name was Cáit Killann

The Cottage was built into the side of a hill;  
I recall two windows and cosmic peace  
Of bare brown rooms and on whitewashed walls  
Photographs of the passionate pale Pearse.

I recall wet thatch and peeling jambs  
and how all was best seen from below in the field;  
I used to sit in the rushes with ledger-book and pencil  
Compiling poems of passion for Cáit Killann.

Often she used to linger on the sill of a window;  
Hands by her side and brown legs akimbo;  
In the sun red skirt and moon-black blazer;  
Looking toward our strange world wide-eyed.  
Our world was strange because it had no future,  
She was America-bound at Summer's end.  
She had no choice but to leave her home -  
The girl with the keys to Pearse's Cottage

O Cáit Killann, O Cáit Killann,  
You have gone with your keys from your own native place.  
Yet here in this dark - El Greco eyes blaze back  
From your Connemara postman's daughter's proudly  
mortal face.

Paul Durcan

## 8. The End of the Day

The barn door shut with a shudder  
as I placed the heavy triangles  
of wood under the tractor's wheels.  
It had been a long day. Leaning my  
shoulder against the huge black tyre  
I blew my tiredness into the night.

Kneeling, alone in God's darkness,  
I thought of my father's grey mare  
tired and steaming, there in the corner,  
after a day ploughing in the high field.  
Sally, he called it. Said he named it  
after his only love, a girl he'd met in Doolin.

My mother's name was Margaret.

Tony Curtis

## 9. McGwinn and Son

**Too many butchers  
in the village  
and alone in his shop  
pretending to be busy  
he suddenly hears  
the long curse  
he never knew was in him,  
the throat of his own  
with a shout  
that goes back to the day  
he put on his father's apron  
and his mouth  
turned into a purse.**

Ted McNulty

## 10. Penance

And still they live in unforgiven places,  
on the sides of arthritic hills,  
where low walls hide the sea and the sea  
hides the dead, though the dead still whisper  
in their silent graves, 'I'm cold, I'm cold.'

Enough bog here to stoke the fires of Hell,  
and stones so many you'd think they grew  
in the soil. Though nothing ever grows.  
God knows there was more wood on Calvary.

This morning, on a high road beyond Cleggan,  
I passed the ruins of a deserted cottage,  
and a ruined cottage that looked deserted,  
only a man eyed me. I asked where the road went?  
'To the end,' he said, 'the end.' Then shuffled off.

Tony Curtis

## 11. Yeats' Fisherman

Though he does not exist,  
I would wed him for life,  
and count myself blessed  
to be named as his wife.

In a cottage of thatch  
I would simmer his broth,  
preserving with patch  
his old suit of grey cloth

for the man without guile  
who can speak with his look,  
whose orbital smile  
relinquishes talk.

I would live out my span  
by his provident stream,  
with this Irish man,  
who is only a dream.

Monica Hoyer

## The Fisherman

*(for comparison)*

Although I can see him still,  
The freckled man who goes  
To a grey place on a hill  
In grey Connemara clothes  
At dawn to cast his flies,  
It's long since I began  
To call up to the eyes  
This wise and simple man.  
All day I'd looked in the face  
What I had hoped 'twould be  
To write for my own race  
And the reality;  
The living men that I hate,  
The dead man that I loved,  
The insolent unreprieved,  
And no knave brought to book  
Who has won a drunken cheer,  
The witty man and his joke  
Aimed at the commonest ear,  
The clever man who cries  
The catch-cries of the clown,  
The beating down of the wise  
And great Art beaten down

Maybe a twelvemonth since  
Sudently I began,  
In scorn of this audience,  
Imagining a man,  
And his sun-freckled face,  
And grey Connemara cloth,  
Climbing up to a place  
Where stone is dark under froth,  
And the down-turn of his wrist  
And when the flies drop in the stream;  
A man who does not exist,  
A man who is but a dream;  
And cried, 'Before I am old  
I shall have written him one  
Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn.'

W.B. Yeats

## 12. Voices

Another bloody day has  
passed  
and it's reported  
in shades of grey

as numerous as the dead,  
too numerous to count.  
The camera crews

are having a field day  
filming green landscapes,  
winter-dulled, windswept,  
death-drabbed; and grey  
unprosperous  
villages where black flags  
slap the gables

of the waking homes;  
*Bandit Country*, somebody  
said

as if we were captured  
in celluloid  
just south of the Rio  
Grande.

Libelling us with labels or  
slandering us with word-  
sorcery. Tit-for-tat

tragedies earn them a living  
but fools can flaunt  
their failings

much too much,  
make others believe.  
Yet I've got

little else  
to offer  
but my words:

jejune at best,  
inane at worst,  
conceived in the mind's

parish of lies.  
Shaped by tribal traits,  
stories of histories

hatching, parables and  
prayers and the  
knowledge of the wedge

hammered home centuries  
ago by outsiders  
to keep the peace,

to separate like from like,  
to create separate voices  
echoing in the wilderness.

Damien Quinn

## 13. Northern Haiku

1

On an Antrim bog  
a wall divides the wet land,  
planted in the past.

2

Under the grey sky  
hills, woods, rivers, bogs, small fields -  
Ulster unionists.

3

A bridge on the Foyle,  
a soldier's gun trained on me-  
teaching nothing new.

4

Car windows misted,  
waiting for a face that wears  
its religion out.

5

Shot twice in the head.  
Once in each astonished eye.  
History is blind.

6

The quick skedaddle.  
Having killed, where do they go?  
Four pints please, Paddy.

7

Over the dark Foyle  
the bark of the kalashnikovs,  
an old Derry air.

8

After the bombing  
Maguire was in Malone's pub  
and Madden's garden.

9

Billy on his horse.  
Giddy-up the I.R.A.  
Photo-fit finish.

10

Squaddies at check-points  
dream of Newcastle Brown Ale:  
drink rain, shit and hate.

11

The twelfth of July,  
King Billy's supporters sit  
supping their Guinness.

12

Punishment shooting -  
pleads remorse and forgiveness.  
Jeans gone at the knees.

13

Witches, have pity,  
freeze the present 'til stragglers  
catch up from the past.

14

Protestant prayers,  
Popish prayers. Funerals.  
We go the same way.

15

A man out ploughing,  
in one field he furrows from  
Ireland to England.

16

A field day for art,  
poetry, painting, drama,  
the siege of Derry.

17

A blackbird's sweet song  
lost in the wildness of hills,  
prayer for the dead.

Tony Curtis

## 14. Postcard from Fermanagh

**Chopper clatter bursting  
Through the treetops  
Above the chalet clearing  
At eggs and bacon breakfast**

**The scout, nosing the forest  
The gunship, a hawk shadow**

**Good day, sir  
Do you have any identification?  
In a soft lilt,  
In a battledress**

**Later, a red Orion  
Disgorges a black SWAT squad**

**Island Enniskillen  
Still fortified, enchants  
We are coming back here  
Next year - sooner, perhaps**

**Where else can peace be enjoyed  
So much, as on a front line?**

Bill O'Keefe

## 15. Enemy Encounter

**Dumping (left over from the autumn)  
Dead leaves, near a culvert  
I come on**

**a British Army Soldier  
with a rifle and a radio  
Perched hiding. He has red hair.**

**He is young enough to be my weenie  
-bopper daughter's boyfriend.  
He is like a lonely little winter robin.  
We are that close to each other, I  
Can nearly hear his heart beating.**

**I say something bland to make him grin,  
But his glass eyes look past my side  
- whiskers down  
the Shore Road Street.**

**I am an Irishman  
and he is afraid  
That I have come to kill him**

Padraic Fiacc

## 16. The Disturbance

A bomb shatters the silence of George Street,  
sending clouds of dust down chimneys.  
In seconds the dull thud dies away,  
only a milk bottle rolling over the pavement  
disturbs the silence with its circular sound -  
Unshaven men in pyjamas stand like convicts  
framed in the doorways of their cells,  
or lean out windows like old farmers  
on wooden gates, staring over concrete fields.  
whose walls hold nothing in.  
Women half dressed, still warm from sleep,  
hold children's hands and let tired faces hang  
like flowers withering after daylight or water.  
While behind them kettles whistle  
and toast burns under the grill.  
Along another quiet road,  
a man, pedalling on old bicycle,  
whistles a familiar Irish air  
as he creaks up a hill towards home,  
the morning paper in his pocket,  
secure, folded like a job well done.

Tony Curtis

## 17. The Follower

**My father worked with a horse plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.**

**An expert. He would set the wing  
And fit the bright-pointed sock.  
The sod rolled over without breaking.  
At the headrig, with a single pluck**

**Of reins, the sweating team turned round  
And back into the land. His eye  
Narrowed and angled at the ground,  
Mapping the furrow exactly.**

**I stumbled in his hobnailed wake,  
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;  
Sometimes he rode me on his back  
Dipping and rising to his plod.**

**I wanted to grow up and plough,  
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.  
All I ever did was follow  
In his broad shadow around the farm.**

**I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,  
Yapping always. But today  
It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away.**

Seamus Heaney

## 18. Digging

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound  
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground;  
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  
Bends low, comes up twenty years away  
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  
To scatter new potatoes that we picked  
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day  
Than any other man on Toner's bog.  
Once I carried him milk in a bottle  
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  
To drink it then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  
Over his shoulder, going down and down  
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney

## 19. The Country Fiddler

My uncle played the fiddle -  
more elegantly the violin -  
A favourite at barn and cross-roads dance,  
He knew *The Sailor's Bonnet*  
and *The Fowling Piece*.

Bachelor head of a house full of sisters,  
Runner of poor racehorses, spendthrift,  
He left for the New World in an old disgrace.

He left his fiddle in the rafters  
When he sailed, never played afterwards;  
A rural art silenced in the discord of Brooklyn.

A heavily-built man, tranquil-eyed as an ox,  
He ran a wild speakeasy, and died of it.  
During the depression many dossed in his  
cellar.

I attended his funeral in the church  
of the Redemption,  
Then, unexpected successor, reversed time  
To return where he had been born.

During my schooldays the fiddle rusted  
(The bridge fell away, the catgut snapped)  
Reduced to a plaything stinking of stale rosin.

The country people asked if I also had music  
(All the family had had )  
but the riddle was in pieces  
And the rafters remade,  
before I discovered my craft.

Twenty years afterwards,  
I saw the church again,  
And promised to remember my burley godfather  
And his rural craft, after this fashion;

So succession passes, through strangest hands.

John Montague

## 20. The Cage

**My father,  
the least happy man I have known.  
His face retained the pallor  
of those who work underground:  
The lost years in Brooklyn  
listening to a subway  
shudder the earth.**

**But a traditional Irishman  
who (released from his grille in  
the Clark St I.R.T.)  
drank neat whiskey until he reached the only  
element he felt at home in any longer:  
brute oblivion.**

**And yet picked himself up,  
most mornings,  
to march down the street  
extending his smile to all sides of the good (non-negro)  
neighbourhood belled by St Teresa's church.**

**When he came back we walked together  
across fields of Garvaghey  
to see hawthorn on the summer hedges,  
as though he had never left;  
a bend of the road  
which still sheltered primroses.  
But we did not smile in the shared complicity  
of a dream,  
for when weary Odysseus returns  
Telemachus must leave.**

**Often as I descend  
into subway or underground  
I see his bald head behind  
the bars of the small booth;  
the mark of an old car  
accident beating on his ghostly forehead.**

John Montague

## 21. Father and Son

Only last week, walking the hushed fields  
of our most lovely Meath, now thinned by November,  
I came to where the road from Laracot leads  
to the Boyne river - that seemed more lake than river,  
Stretched in uneasy light and stript of reeds.

And walking longside an old weir  
Of my people's, where nothing stirs - only the shadowed  
leaden flight of a heron up the lean air  
I went unmanly with grief, knowing how my father,  
Happy though captive in years, walked last with me there.

Yes, happy in Meath with me for a day  
He walked, taking stock of herds hid in their own breathing;  
And naming colts, gusty as wind, once steered by his hand,  
Lightnings winked in the eyes that were half shy in greeting  
Old friends - the wild blades, when he gallivanted the land.

For that proud, wayward man now my heart breaks -  
Breaks for that man whose mind was a secret eyrie,  
Whose kind hand was sole signet of his race,  
Who curbed me, scorned my green ways, yet increasingly  
loved me  
Till Death drew its grey blind down his face.

And yet I am pleased that even my reckless ways  
Are living shades of his rich calms and passions -  
Witnesses for him and for those faint namesakes  
With whom now he is one, under yew branches,  
Yes, one in a graven silence no bird breaks.

F.R. Higgins

## 22. My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold

**My heart leaps up when I behold**

**A rainbow in the sky:**

**So was it when my life began;**

**So is it now I am a man;**

**So be it when I shall grow old,**

**Or let me die!**

**The Child is father of the Man;**

**I could wish my days to be**

**Bound each to each by natural piety.**

William Wordsworth

## 23. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood - extracts

*Lamenting the passing of childhood, it seems to the poet that in childhood we are able to appreciate nature more fully than we can as adults:*

I

THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
    Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;-  
    Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

*At birth we arrive 'trailing clouds of glory' but what happens to us as we grow older? Read on:*

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
    Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
    And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
    From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
    Upon the growing Boy,  
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
    He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
    Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
    And by the vision splendid  
    Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day.

## VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
And, even with something of a Mother's mind,  
    And no unworthy aim,  
    The homely Nurse doth all she can  
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,  
    Forget the glories he hath known,  
And that imperial palace whence he came.

*As we grow older, what effect does the world have upon us? Read on:*

## VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,  
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!  
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,  
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,  
With light upon him from his father's eyes!  
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,  
Some fragment from his dream of human life,  
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;  
    A wedding or a festival,  
    A mourning or a funeral;  
    And this hath now his heart,  
And unto this he frames his song:  
    Then will he fit his tongue  
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;  
    But it will not be long  
    Ere this be thrown aside,  
    And with new joy and pride  
The little Actor cons another part;  
Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'  
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,  
That Life brings with her in her equipage;  
    As if his whole vocation  
    Were endless imitation.

William Wordsworth

## 24. Anecdote for Fathers

I HAVE a boy of five years old;  
His face is fair and fresh to see;  
His limbs are cast in beauty's mould,  
And dearly he loves me.

One morn we strolled on our dry walk,  
Our quiet home all full in view,  
And held such intermitted talk  
As we are wont to do.

My thoughts on former pleasures ran;  
I thought of Kilve's delightful shore,                   10  
Our pleasant home when spring began,  
A long, long year before.

A day it was when I could bear  
Some fond regrets to entertain;  
With so much happiness to spare,  
I could not feel a pain.

The green earth echoed to the feet  
Of lambs that bounded through the glade,  
From shade to sunshine, and as fleet  
From sunshine back to shade.                                   20

Birds warbled round me-and each trace  
Of inward sadness had its charm;  
Kilve, thought I, was a favoured place,  
And so is Liswyn farm.

My boy beside me tripped, so slim  
And graceful in his rustic dress!  
And, as we talked, I questioned him,  
In very idleness.

'Now tell me, had you rather be,'  
I said, and took him by the arm,                           30  
'On Kilve's smooth shore, by the green sea,  
Or here at Liswyn farm?'

In careless mood he looked at me,  
While still I held him by the arm,  
And said, 'At Kilve I'd rather be  
Than here at Liswyn farm.'

'Now, little Edward, say why so:

My little Edward, tell me why.'-  
'I cannot tell, I do not know.'-  
'Why, this is strange,' said I; 40

'For, here are woods, hills smooth and warm:  
There surely must some reason be  
Why you would change sweet Liswyn farm  
For Kilve by the green sea.'

At this, my boy hung down his head,  
He blushed with shame, nor made reply;  
And three times to the child I said,  
'Why, Edward, tell me why?'

His head he raised-there was in sight,  
It caught his eye, he saw it plain- 50  
Upon the house-top, glittering bright,  
A broad and gilded vane.

Then did the boy his tongue unlock,  
And eased his mind with this reply:  
'At Kilve there was no weather-cock;  
And that's the reason why.'

O dearest, dearest boy! my heart  
For better lore would seldom yearn,  
Could I but teach the hundredth part  
Of what from thee I learn. 60 William Wordsworth

## 25. Elegy Written In A Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r  
The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such, as wand'ring near her secret bow'r,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,  
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:  
No children run to lisp their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;  
How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,  
If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,  
Where thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault  
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,  
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page  
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;  
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast  
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;  
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,  
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,  
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone  
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;

Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,  
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,  
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride  
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,  
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;  
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,  
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,  
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,  
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,  
The place of fame and elegy supply:  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;  
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,

Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,  
'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn  
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away  
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

**‘There at the foot of yonder nodding beech  
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.**

**‘Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Mutt’ring his wayward fancies he would rove,  
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
Or craz’d with care, or cross’d in hopeless love.**

**‘One morn I miss’d him on the custom’d hill,  
Along the heath and near his fav’rite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;**

**‘The next with dirges due in sad array  
Slow thro’ the church-way path we saw him borne.  
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
Grav’d on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.’**

Thomas Gray

### The EPitaph

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth  
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.  
Fair Science frown’d not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy mark’d him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
Heav’n did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Mis’ry all he had, a tear,  
He gain’d from Heav’n (’twas all he wish’d) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
The bosom of his Father and his God.

## 26. Elegiac Stanzas

In memory of my Brother, John Wordsworth, Commander of the  
E.[ast] I.[ndia] Company's Ship The Earl of Abergavenny in he  
Perished by Calamitous Shipwreck Feb.6<sup>th</sup>, 1805

### I

**THE Sheep-boy whistled loud, and lo!  
That instant, startled by the shock,  
The Buzzard mounted from the rock  
Deliberate and slow:  
Lord of the air, he took his flight;  
Oh! could he on that woeful night  
Have lent his wing, my Brother dear,  
For one poor moment's space to Thee,  
And all who struggled with the Sea,  
When safety was so near.**

### II

**Thus in the weakness of my heart  
I spoke (but let that pang be still)  
When rising from the rock at will,  
I saw the Bird depart.  
And let me calmly bless the Power  
That meets me in this unknown Flower.  
Affecting type of him I mourn!  
With calmness suffer and believe,  
And grieve, and know that I must grieve,  
Not cheerless, though forlorn.**

### III

**Here did we stop; and here looked round  
While each into himself descends,  
For that last thought of parting Friends  
That is not to be found.  
Hidden was Grasmere Vale from sight,  
Our home and his, his heart's delight,  
His quiet heart's selected home.  
But time before him melts away,  
And he hath feeling of a day  
Of blessedness to come.**

#### IV

Full soon in sorrow did I weep,  
Taught that the mutual hope was dust,  
In sorrow, but for higher trust,  
How miserably deep!  
All vanished in a single word,  
A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard:  
Sea-Ship-drowned-Shipwreck-so it came,  
The meek, the brave, the good, was gone;  
He who had been our living John  
Was nothing but a name.

#### V

That was indeed a parting! oh,  
Glad am I, glad that it is past;  
For there were some on whom it cast  
Unutterable woe.  
But they as well as I have gains;-  
From many a humble source, to pains  
Like these, there comes a mild release;  
Even here I feel it, even this Plant  
Is in its beauty ministrant  
To comfort and to peace.

#### VI

He would have loved thy modest grace,  
Meek Flower! To Him I would have said,  
'It grows upon its native bed  
Beside our Parting-place;  
There, cleaving to the ground, it lies  
With multitude of purple eyes,  
Spangling a cushion green like moss;  
But we will see it, joyful tide!  
Some day, to see it in its pride,  
The mountain will we cross.'

#### VII

-Brother and Friend, if verse of mine  
Have power to make thy virtues known,

**Here let a monumental Stone  
Stand-sacred as a Shrine;  
And to the few who pass this way,  
Traveller or Shepherd, let it say,  
Long as these mighty rocks endure,-  
Oh do not Thou too fondly brood,  
Although deserving of all good,  
On any earthly hope, however pure!**

William Wordsworth

## 27. In Memory of Major Robert Gregory

### I

NOW that we're almost settled in our house  
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us  
Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient tower,  
And having talked to some late hour  
Discoverers of forgotten truth  
Or mere companions of my youth,  
All, all are in my thoughts to-night being dead.

### II

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old  
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,  
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart  
In the affections of our heart,  
And quarrels are blown up upon that head;  
But not a friend that I would bring  
This night can set us quarrelling,  
For all that come into my mind are dead.

### III

Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,  
That loved his learning better than mankind.  
Though courteous to the worst; much falling he  
Brooded upon sanctity  
Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed  
A long blast upon the horn that brought  
A little nearer to his thought  
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

### IV

And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,  
That dying chose the living world for text  
And never could have rested in the tomb  
But that, long travelling, he had come  
Towards nightfall upon certain set apart  
In a most desolate stony place,  
Towards nightfall upon a race  
Passionate and simple like his heart.

V

And then I think of old George Pollexfen,  
In muscular youth well known to Mayo men  
For horsemanship at meets or at racecourses,  
That could have shown how pure-bred horses  
And solid men, for all their passion, live  
But as the outrageous stars incline  
By opposition, square and trine;  
Having grown sluggish and contemplative.

VI

They were my close companions many a year.  
A portion of my mind and life, as it were,  
And now their breathless faces seem to look  
Out of some old picture-book;  
I am accustomed to their lack of breath,  
But not that my dear friend's dear son,  
Our Sidney and our perfect man,  
Could share in that discourtesy of death.

VII

For all things the delighted eye now sees  
Were loved by him: the old storm-broken trees  
That cast their shadows upon road and bridge;  
The tower set on the stream's edge;  
The ford where drinking cattle make a stir  
Nightly, and startled by that sound  
The water-hen must change her ground;  
He might have been your heartiest welcomer.

VIII

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride  
From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side  
Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace;  
At Mooneen he had leaped a place  
So perilous that half the astonished meet  
Had shut their eyes; and where was it  
He rode a race without a bit?  
And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.

**IX**

**We dreamed that a great painter had been born  
To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,  
To that stern colour and that delicate line  
That are our secret discipline  
Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.  
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
And yet he had the intensity  
To have published all to be a world's delight.**

**X**

**What other could so well have counselled us  
In all lovely intricacies of a house  
As he that practised or that understood  
All work in metal or in wood,  
In moulded plaster or in carven stone?  
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
And all he did done perfectly  
As though he had but that one trade alone.**

**XI**

**Some burn damp faggots, others may consume  
The entire combustible world in one small room  
As though dried straw, and if we turn about  
The bare chimney is gone black out  
Because the work had finished in that flare.  
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
A'st were all life's epitome.  
What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?**

**XII**

**I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind  
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind  
All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved  
Or boyish intellect approved,  
With some appropriate commentary on each;  
Until imagination brought  
A fitter welcome; but a thought  
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.**

W.B. Yeats

## 28. In Memory of W.B. Yeats (d. Jan. 1939)

I

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted,  
And snow disfigured the public statues;  
The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.  
What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness  
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,  
The peasant reiver was untempted by the fashionable quays;  
By mourning tongues  
The death of the poet was kept from his poems.

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,  
An afternoon of nurses and rumours;  
The provinces of his body revolted,  
The squares of his mind were empty,  
Silence invaded the suburbs,  
The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities  
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,  
To find his happiness in another kind of wood  
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.  
The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living.

But in the importance and noise of to-morrow  
When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse,  
And the poor have the sufferings to which they are fairly accustomed,  
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom,  
A few thousand will think of this day  
As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.

What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

II

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:

The parish of rich women, physical decay,  
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.  
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,  
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

### III

Earth, receive an honoured guest:  
William Yeats is laid to rest.  
Let the Irish vessel lie  
Emptied of its poetry.

In the nightmare of the dark  
All the dogs of Europe bark,  
And the living nations wait,  
Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace  
Stares from every human face,  
And the seas of pity lie  
Locked and frozen in each eye.

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,  
Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

W. H. Auden

a. The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket  
 (For Warren Winslow, Dead at Sea)  
 An extract

*Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.*

I

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket -  
 The sea was still breaking violently and night  
 Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,  
 When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light  
 Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,  
 He grappled at the net  
 With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:  
 The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,  
 Its open, staring eyes  
 Were lustreless dead-lights  
 Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk  
 Heavy with sand.  
 We weight the body, close  
 Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came,  
 Where the heel-headed dogfish barks it nose  
 On Ahab's void and forehead; and the name  
 Is blocked in yellow chalk.  
 Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea  
 Where dreadnaughts shall confess  
 Its hell-bent deity,  
 When you are powerless  
 To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced  
 By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste  
 In his steel scales: ask for no Orphean lute  
 To pluck life back. The guns of the steeled fleet  
 Recoil and then repeat  
 The hoarse salute.

Robert Lowell

b. Elegy

The way we are living,  
timorous or bold,  
will have been our life.  
Robert Lowell,

the sill geranium is lit  
by the lamp I write by,  
a wind from the Irish Sea  
is shaking it-

here where we all sat  
ten days ago, with you,  
the master elegist  
and welder of English.

As you swayed the talk  
and rode on the swaying tiller  
of yourself, ribbing me  
about my fear of water,

what was not within your empery?  
You drank America  
like the heart's  
iron vodka,

promulgating art's  
deliberate, peremptory  
love and arrogance.  
Your eyes saw what your hand did

as you Englished Russian,  
as you bullied out  
heart-hammering blank sonnets  
of love for Harriet

and Lizzle, and the briny  
water-breaking dolphin-  
your dorsal nib  
gifted at last

to inveigle and to plash,  
helmsman, netsman, *retiarius*.  
That hand. Warding and grooming  
and amphibious.

Two a.m., seaboard weather.  
Not the proud sail of your great verse ...  
No. You were our night ferry  
thudding in a big sea,

the whole craft ringing  
with an armourer's music  
the course set wilfully across  
the ungovernable and dangerous.

And now a teem of rain  
and the geranium *tremens*.  
*A father's no shield  
for his child-*

you found the child in me  
when you took farewells  
under the full bay tree  
by the gate in Glanmore,

opulent and restorativ  
as that lingering summertime,  
the fish-dart of your eyes  
risking, 'I'll pray for you.'

Seamus Heaney

## 30. Casualty

I

He would drink by himself  
And raise a weathered thumb  
Towards the high shelf,  
Calling another rum  
And blackcurrant, without  
Having to raise his voice,  
Or order a quick stout  
By a lifting of the eyes  
And a discreet dumb-show  
Of pulling off the top;  
At closing time would go  
In waders and peaked cap  
Into the showery dark,  
A dole-kept breadwinner  
But a natural for work.  
I loved his whole manner,  
Sure-footed but too sly,  
His deadpan sidling tact,  
His fisherman's quick eye  
And turned observant back.

Incomprehensible  
To him, my other life.  
Sometimes on the high stool,  
Too busy with his knife  
At a tobacco plug  
And not meeting my eye,  
In the pause after a slug  
He mentioned poetry.  
We would be on our own  
And, always politic  
And shy of condescension,  
I would manage by some trick  
To switch the talk to eels  
Or lore of the horse and cart  
Or the Provisionals.

But my tentative art  
His turned back watches too:  
He was blown to bits  
Out drinking in a curfew  
Others obeyed, three nights  
After they shot dead  
The thirteen men in Derry.  
PARAS THIRTEEN, the walls  
said,  
BOGSIDE NIL. That Wednesday  
Everyone held  
His breath and trembled.

II

It was a day of cold  
Raw silence, wind-blown  
Surplice and soutane:  
Rained-on, flower-laden  
Coffin after coffin  
Seemed to float from the door  
Of the packed cathedral  
Like blossoms on slow water.  
The common funeral  
Unrolled its swaddling band,  
Lapping, tightening  
Till we were braced and bound  
Like brothers in a ring.

But he would not be held  
At home by his own crowd  
Whatever threats were phoned,  
Whatever black flags waved.  
I see him as he turned  
In that bombed offending place,  
Remorse fused with terror  
In his still knowable face,  
His cornered outfaced stare  
Blinding in the flash.

He had gone miles away  
For he drank like a fish  
Nightly, naturally  
Swimming towards the lure  
Of warm lit-up places,  
The blurred mesh and murmur  
Drifting among glasses  
In the gregarious smoke.  
How culpable was he  
That last night when he broke  
Our tribe's complicity?  
'Now, you're supposed to be  
An educated man,'  
I hear him say. 'Puzzle me  
The right answer to that one.'

### III

I missed his funeral,  
Those quiet walkers  
And sideways talkers  
Shoaling out of his lane  
To the respectable  
Purring of the hearse...

They move in equal pace  
With the habitual  
Slow consolation  
Of a dawdling engine,  
The line lifted, hand  
Over fist, cold sunshine  
On the water, the land  
Banked under fog: that morning  
I was taken in his boat,  
The screw purling, turning  
Indolent fathoms white,  
I tasted freedom with him.  
To get out early, haul  
Steadily off the bottom,  
Dispraise the catch, and smile  
As you find a rhythm  
Working you, slow mile by mile,  
Into your proper haunt  
Somewhere, well out, beyond...

Dawn-sniffing revenant,  
Plodder through midnight rain,  
Question me again.

Seamus Heaney

## 31. Ode

### Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of an Early Childhood

I

THERE was a time when meadow, grove, and  
stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;-  
Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can see no  
more.

II

The Rainbow comes and goes,  
And lovely is the Rose,  
The Moon doth with delight  
Look round her when the heavens are bare,  
Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

III

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,  
And while the young lambs bound  
As to the tabor's sound,  
To me alone there came a thought of grief.  
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,  
And I again am strong:  
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;  
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;  
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,  
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,  
And all the earth is gay;  
Land and sea  
Give themselves up to jollity,  
And with the heart of May  
Doth every Beast keep holiday;-  
Thou Child of Joy,  
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy  
Shepherd-boy!

IV

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call  
Ye to each other make; I see  
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;  
My heart is at your festival,  
My head bath its coronal,  
The fulness of your bliss, I feel- I feel it all.  
Oh evil day! if I were sullen  
While Earth herself is adorning,  
This sweet May-morning,

And the Children are culling  
On every side,

In a thousand valleys far and wide,  
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,  
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:-  
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!  
- But there's a Tree, of many, one,  
A single Field which I have looked upon,  
Both of them speak of something that is gone:  
The Pansy at my feet  
Doth the same tale repeat:  
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,  
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;  
The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended;  
At length the Man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day.

VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;  
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,  
And, even with something of a Mother's mind,  
And no unworthy aim,  
The homely Nurse doth all she can  
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,  
Forget the glories he hath known,  
And that imperial palace whence he came.

VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,  
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!  
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,  
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,  
With light upon him from his father's eyes!  
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,  
Some fragment from his dream of human life,  
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;  
A wedding or a festival,

A mourning or a funeral;  
 And this bath now his heart,  
 And unto this he frames his song:  
 Then will he fit his tongue  
 To dialogues of business, love, or strife;  
 But it will not be long  
 Ere this be thrown aside,  
 And with new joy and pride  
 The little Actor cons another part;  
 Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'  
 With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,  
 That Life brings with her in her equipage;  
 As if his whole vocation  
 Were endless imitation.

#### VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie  
 Thy Soul's immensity;  
 Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep  
 Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,  
 That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,  
 Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,-  
 Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!  
 On whom those truths do rest,  
 Which we are toiling all our lives to find,  
 In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;  
 Thou, over whom thy Immortality  
 Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,  
 A Presence which is not to be put by;  
 Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might  
 Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,  
 Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke  
 The years to bring the inevitable yoke,  
 Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?  
 Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,  
 And custom lie upon thee with a weight  
 Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

#### IX

O joy! that in our embers  
 Is something that doth live,  
 That nature yet remembers  
 What was so fugitive!  
 The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
 Perpetual benediction: not indeed  
 For that which is most worthy to be blest--  
 Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
 Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
 With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:-  
 Not for these I raise  
 The song of thanks and praise;  
 But for those obstinate questionings  
 Of sense and outward things,  
 Fallings from us, vanishings;  
 Blank misgivings of a Creature  
 Moving about in worlds not realised,  
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature  
 Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:  
 But for those first affections,  
 Those shadowy recollections,  
 Which, be they what they may,

Are yet the fountain light of all our day,  
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing;  
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
 Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,  
 To perish never;  
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,  
 Nor Man nor Boy,  
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
 Can utterly abolish or destroy!  
 Hence in a season of calm weather  
 Though inland far we be,  
 Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
 Which brought us hither,  
 Can in a moment travel thither,  
 And see the Children sport upon the shore,  
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

#### X

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!  
 And let the young Lambs bound  
 As to the tabor's sound!  
 We in thought will join your throng,  
 Ye that pipe and ye that play,  
 Ye that through your hearts to-day  
 Feel the gladness of the May!  
 What though the radiance which was once so  
 bright  
 Be now for ever taken from my sight,  
 Though nothing can bring back the hour  
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
 We will grieve not, rather find  
 Strength in what remains behind;  
 In the primal sympathy  
 Which having been must ever be;  
 In the soothing thoughts that spring  
 Out of human suffering;  
 In the faith that looks through death,  
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

#### XI

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and  
 Groves,  
 Forebode not any severing of our loves!  
 Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;  
 I only have relinquished one delight  
 To live beneath your more habitual sway.  
 I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,  
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;  
 The innocent brightness of a new-born Day  
 Is lovely yet;  
 The Clouds that gather round the setting sun  
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye  
 That bathed kept watch o'er man's mortality;  
 Another race hath been, and other palms are won.  
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

William Wordsworth

Irish Literature at GCSE - SEG  
English 2400  
English Literature 2495

# **Crossing the Irish Sea**

*B. Students' activity booklet*

By

**Tim Kershaw**

'Ireland in Schools'  
*for*  
The Warrington Project

SU24B

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Part one

# Culture, history and society in Ireland

# 1. Home and family

**For this study unit you need to have an understanding of what culture and society are.**

**People are created by the culture they belong to. The home and family in which they live help to pass on and often strengthen cultural ties.**

**WRITE OR TALK OR THINK ABOUT YOUR HOME AND FAMILY CULTURE.**

**The physical environment may create a mood and atmosphere.**

**Your family may have a collective belief or attitude which is important, such as religion, politics, cynicism or support for order and the establishment.**

**Your family may have supported a particular team for generations.**

**You and your family may like particular books, newspapers, films, art and other forms of media.**

**You may feel pressure to succeed in exams and make your way in the world.**

**On a simple level, does your family express emotion or suppress it?**

**Your family may have strong ideas about who your friends should be. Why?**

**HOW HAVE YOU REACTED TO YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT AND ITS CULTURE?**

**DO YOU BELONG, OR ARE YOU IN TENSION WITH IT?**

**Perhaps the following words will help you:**

**confined, empty, hectic, relaxed, strict,  
noise, tranquil, affection, indifference,  
politically aware, liberal, conservative.**

## 2. Local area and community

**The second environment is your local area and community, for example, Merseyside.**

**BRAINSTORM IMAGES AND IDEAS ABOUT MERSEYSIDE.**

**Some of these may be from television, which you may debate.**

**Do you think accent is important?**

**Do you know people who think that Merseyside is special and different to other cities?**

**Do you have an idea of a typical 'scouser'?**

**What idea do you have of the history of Merseyside? How have Merseysiders added to the nation's culture through the things they have made, their music and art, or their contribution to Britain's defence?**

**Do you think you belong to Merseyside or do you feel separate from the image of the place?**

**IF YOU DO NOT COME FROM MERSEYSIDE, THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN LOCAL ENVIRONMENT.**

**How is the Wirral a different culture from that of Liverpool?**

### 3. Ireland's culture

**This study unit of work explores the relationship between people and their culture which is expressed in contemporary Irish poetry.**

**The poets have been influenced by the whole culture and environment of Ireland.**

**The poems themselves reveal interaction between the culture, the environment and the characters in the poetry.**

**BRAINSTORM IMAGES AND IDEAS YOU HAVE ABOUT IRELAND FOR A DISPLAY.**

**Use as many sources as you can:**

**Irish tourism advertisements**

**The news**

**Films: *Lamb, The Crying Game, The Commitments***

**Television: *Father Ted***

**Music: The Cranberries, Sinead O'Connor, Shane McGowan, U2**

**Historical documents**

**The Internet.**

## 4. Different cultures in Ireland

The word **CULTURE** as it is used in this unit has a complex meaning.

It is a combination of history, religion, politics, family, language physical landscape (both rural and urban) etc.

Irish culture does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, it has been influenced by the cultures of Britain, Europe and particularly America.

Many cultures may make up one country's **SOCIETY**. These cultures may fit into or be in tension with society.

The different poems in this unit emphasise different aspects of the Irish culture, sometimes more than one.

### RURAL IRELAND

Some poems are a response to the rural environment and its landscape. Ireland has a particular landscape of hills, rivers, loughs and seashore. This landscape and its rural communities have helped to create the people who become poets.

Ireland is still a place where the country way of life is more dominant than city life. There are still family farms and small holdings where there are a few cows, pigs, hens and a few crops grown. The family tries to support itself and if there is any surplus it is sold to a local co-operative.

Even large farms are not as extensive or affected by technology as English farms. The electricity supply and water supply are not always efficient.

In the West of Ireland, especially, the family land is not all together but there is an acre here, half a mile away another acre and so on. Land used to be divided between all the sons, getting smaller by each division.

Ireland has a thriving economy, often being described as Europe's 'tiger economy'. At the same time, there is a lot of poverty and unemployment. It can be a narrow, claustrophobic way of life. British, Germans and Americans go to Ireland for an idyllic holiday. The Irish, including poets, try to escape the confined life.

The tension between wanting more freedom from the place, but belonging, leads to poetry. The landscape and way of life is written about with romantic celebration, rejection and a sense of loss.

### CITIES

Dublin and Belfast have created their own city environments. Some poets have been formed by belonging here. There is still a wish to escape at times: escape from urban squalor to a new life, or escape to the security of a rural past.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE ABOUT BEING BROUGHT UP IN THE IRISH COUNTRYSIDE?

WHAT WOULD YOU DISLIKE ABOUT BEING BROUGHT UP IN THE IRISH COUNTRYSIDE?

WOULD YOU PREFER TO BE BROUGHT UP IN AN IRISH CITY?

THINK ABOUT THE FILMS 'THE COMMITMENTS' OR 'THE SNAPPER' IF YOU HAVE SEEN THEM.

ARE THE CULTURES OF OTHER COUNTRIES ATTRACTIVE TO THE CHARACTERS IN THESE FILMS?

## 5. History and Irish culture

**The culture of Ireland is affected by its history. Ireland was invaded and colonised by England for nearly a thousand years. Even though there are peace talks and a cease-fire at the moment, the worlds of Ireland and England, of Catholic and Protestant, South and North, have not integrated. There are still tensions and huge differences in outlook.**

### LIVING HISTORY

**The ordinary people in Ireland, both North and South, are more aware of their history than English people. They write 'Remember 1690' or 'Easter 1916' on gable ends in Belfast. They feel passionate about their history. The English have a more secure sense of identity. The changes and conflicts between Celt, Saxon, Viking and Norman in England happened a long time ago. In Ireland change and conflict are happening now:**

**'if you are inside a changing society the only kind of poetry you will write must recognise changes going on.'**

Louis MacNeice

**The inhabitants of the North, in particular, are unsure of themselves. The Protestants feel threatened by the Catholic South, and rejected by England.**

### LEAVING IRELAND

**The potato famine in the middle of the nineteenth century meant the population of Ireland dropped dramatically because of death or emigration. People still remember this, and many still have to leave Ireland because of poverty and lack of opportunity.**

**Many Irish poets have left Ireland at some time in their lives, both physically and**

WHY IS HISTORY MORE IMPORTANT TO IRISH PEOPLE THAN IT IS TO US?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IRISH HISTORY FROM YOUR GENERAL KNOWLEDGE?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE RECENT TROUBLES?

**spiritually, and a feeling of exile, homelessness, is in some of the poems.**

## 6. Religion and Irish culture

**The environment of Ireland is affected by religion. In England it is hard for most of us to understand the significance of religion as part of ordinary lives. How many people in school go to church every Sunday or believe in God?**

**In Ireland the people who want a united Ireland separate from Britain have become identified with the Catholic Church. The people who want Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom, have become identified with the Protestant Churches.**

**Both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches have more power than in England. They have power in the life of individuals. Religious attitudes to the role of parents, to sin, to sex are strong in many Irish families. Both Catholic and Protestant Churches are strict and, to most English people, old fashioned. Schools are religious institutions with more religious assemblies, lessons and attitudes than English schools.**

**The Churches have more power in the government of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, although this is beginning to break down. Until very recently, divorce, re-marriage and contraception were not part of Irish society, while abortion remains illegal, unlike the situation in England.**

**Faith in God offers hope to many but religion can make life suffocating for some. Even if they want to, it is difficult for many to reject the world of their childhood.**

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'FAITH' AND 'RELIGION'?

DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WITH STRONG RELIGIOUS BELIEFS?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE TO THEIR LIVES?

DO YOU THINK CHURCHES SHOULD HAVE MORE POWER IN ENGLAND?

## 7. Language and Irish culture

**The environment of Ireland is affected by language.**

**Part of your personal environment is your language. The way you speak is part of your identity.**

**In Ireland the poets are not even sure of their language. Irish is taught in all schools in the Republic. It is the patriotic language. Yet many people do not speak Irish naturally. Is the Irish language pointless and old fashioned or is it a powerful symbol of national identity? The poets from the Republic have to make this decision.**

**Many poets do choose to write in Irish nowadays. English translations can never capture the full meaning of their poems as sound is part of the effect of poetry. Irish, with more soft consonants and long vowel sounds, is gentler than English. Perhaps it expresses the insecurities and sorrow better.**

**Even the English spoken in Ireland is different from the English spoken in England. In Ireland poetry and poetic speech is part of ordinary life. There is more imagery and richness - or so the Irish claim.**

WHAT WOULD YOU FEEL LIKE IF YOU WERE INVADED BY ANOTHER COUNTRY AND THEY TRIED TO STOP US SPEAKING ENGLISH?

DO YOU LIKE IT IF YOUR ACCENT IS LAUGHED AT?

## 8. New environments - emigration and exile

Over the centuries, many Irish people have had to leave their native land and seek new lives in foreign countries such as America, Australia and the West Indies. Often, Irish people have sought to maintain their Irish identity in these new countries. Although the relationship between England and Ireland has always been tense, many Irish people settled and found work in English and Scottish cities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their presence is still felt strongly in all aspects of life in cities such as London, Liverpool and Glasgow. In the late twentieth century the Republic of Ireland has found a new identity as a European nation; for the first time in its recent history more people are emigrating *to* Ireland than are leaving it.

Many people found that their problems were just as great when they arrived in the 'new world'. Below is an extract from *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt. McCourt's early childhood was spent in Brooklyn (a part of New York) but times were hard in America in the nineteen thirties and his family had to return to Limerick in Ireland.

*When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all...People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious [talkative] alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.*

IF YOU READ THE REST OF THE NOVEL, YOU WILL FIND THAT MCCOURT DID INDEED HAVE A DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD BUT WHAT MIGHT MAKE YOU THINK THAT THE ABOVE COMMENTS ARE TONGUE-IN-CHEEK? PICK OUT THE STEREOTYPES FROM HIS REMARKS.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF PAYING TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO STEREOTYPES?

Emigration is not limited to Irish people. The United States of America is made up of emigrants from many European countries.

## 9. Uncertainties of Irish poetry

**The culture of Ireland has led to poems which have a feeling of loss, of searching, of questioning. The Irish poets seem more aware of their culture and its environment, exploring and commenting on the effect of it on themselves and on their characters.**

**The poets are in the centre of values, cultures, and languages which are hostile to each other. They make the reader actively involved in the uncertainties.**

THINK ABOUT EMIGRATION.

MAKE A LIST OF REASONS WHY PEOPLE MIGHT WANT OR HAVE TO EMIGRATE.

MAKE A LIST OF THE EXPECTATIONS ANY EMIGRANT TO THE UNITED STATES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY MIGHT HAVE HAD. MAKE ANOTHER LIST OF THE DIFFICULTIES THEY MIGHT HAVE FACED.

THINK ABOUT EMOTIONAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES.

Part two

## The elegy

## 10. A literary tradition

### the elegy in England and Irish poetry

*You will find the poems mentioned here in the anthology accompanying this pack.*

An elegy is simply a poem written to mourn someone's death. Often it will contain details of the life they led and the reasons why they will be missed. One of the most famous examples is 'Lycidas' by the English poet John Milton. Written around 1645 he laments the death of a friend drowned in the Irish Sea during a sea voyage from Chester. Read this extract:

*Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,  
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,  
And with forc'd fingers rude,  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
Compels me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not flote upon his watry bear  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.*

Another famous elegy is by Thomas Gray. Written around 1750, Gray's 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' does not mourn one particular person but instead considers all the ordinary people buried in the graves beneath the poet's feet; perhaps, he thinks, a great undiscovered writer lies there or maybe a man who would have made a great leader. That said, the poet admits that many of the sleepers were simply ordinary folk who never realised great glories or committed horrible crimes. They simply trod the path of their own lives quietly, the noisy crowd all the while thronging around them.

Although elegies are written about a sad event, they can be used to celebrate the life of the dead person. We refer to the elegy as a literary tradition because we can find examples of elegies throughout history. The elegy is a literary tradition which connects poets of many different countries and cultures, including Ireland and England.

#### SECRET WEAPON

Sometimes elegies are used for a more hidden purpose. At the same time as mourning your friend or perhaps a famous person, you can use your elegy to criticise subtly his enemies or even people you do not like. Milton used 'Lycidas' to criticise priests, many of whom he thought were corrupt.

#### MAKING YOUR MARK

**If you are starting out as a poet, one way of being noticed is to write an elegy for another poet whom you have admired, perhaps someone who has influenced you. If you are already a famous poet, it might be expected of you to write an elegy for an equally famous colleague. The Irish poet W. B. Yeats wrote an elegy for Major Robert Gregory, the son of his friend the writer, Lady Gregory. Major Gregory was an Irishman who was killed whilst flying for the British air force in World War One. In the poem, Yeats mentions the names of other men, some of whom were famous.**

THINK ABOUT OTHER REASONS WHY PEOPLE WRITE ELEGIES.

**By doing this, he gives Major Gregory the same importance as them.**

**When W. B. Yeats died in 1939, the English poet W. H. Auden wrote an elegy for him. The modern Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote an elegy for the American poet Robert Lowell. Lowell was well known for stretching language to the limit and using**

TRY WRITING AN ELEGY. YOU MIGHT CONSIDER WRITING YOUR ELEGY FOR SOMEONE FAMOUS WHO HAS RECENTLY DIED.

ELEGIES CAN ALSO BE IRONIC. TRY WRITING AN ELEGY FOR THE TEAM YOU SUPPORT BEMOANING THE PASSING OF THEIR SKILL AND THEIR ONCE GREAT GLORIES.

YOU COULD WRITE AN ELEGY FOR A HUMAN QUALITY OR ABSTRACT SUBJECT WHICH YOU FEEL IS LACKING IN SOCIETY, FOR EXAMPLE, HONESTY, COMPASSION, OR TOLERANCE.

**words in strange or unusual ways. Heaney echoes Lowell's lust for life and language in his own poem.**

Part three

## Parents and children

## 11. Another literary tradition parents and children

Many of the poets in the anthology choose to write about their relationship with one of their parents. You have seen that family life plays an important part in Irish culture. Perhaps because Irish culture is changing quickly, some aspect of their parents' beliefs or behaviour seems strange to the poet. However, writing about your parents is a tradition which spans both Irish and English poetry.

For many years men and women have used poetry to re-examine their childhoods. Often, they come to the realisation that although they feel different to their parents, they also share many similarities. Sometimes these similarities only come to the surface as they grow older.

Irish poet Seamus Heaney writes about his father in 'Follower' and 'Digging'. Heaney's father was a farmer. Writing poetry might seem very different to farming but read both poems and see what links Heaney with his father. Irish poet Paula Meehan writes about her mother in 'The Pattern.' Although she seemed rather distant when Meehan was a child, the poet seems to have reached a kind of understanding of her mother and the problems she faced.

As we grow up, our childhood can seem increasingly foreign to us. We mature physically and mentally. Childhood toys and activities seem foolish. We are gradually allowed to play a greater part in society. Yet are there valuable things we leave behind?

Look at Wordsworth's short poem 'My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold' which contains the line 'The Child is father of the Man'. Wordsworth believed that children had a great deal to teach adults. He thought that as we grow older we lose touch with nature and our spirituality declines. What do you think he meant by 'The Child is father of the Man'?

THINK OF THINGS YOU TOOK PLEASURE IN AS A YOUNG CHILD.  
WHY DID YOU ENJOY THEM?  
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THEM NOW YOU ARE OLDER?

ADULTS ARE FOND OF THE PHRASE 'OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF  
BABES'. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS MEANT BY THIS?  
WHAT THINGS DO YOU THINK CHILDREN CAN TEACH ADULTS?

Read the extracts from Wordsworth's ode 'Intimations of Immortality'. What do we seem to lose on our journey from infancy to adulthood?

Part four

## Tasks on individual poems

1. A Tourist Comments on the Land of his Forefathers

Julie O'Callaghan

**Why does the poet use dialect?**

**Why has the poet chosen not to use rhyme?**

**How do you know what the American feels about Dublin and Dubliners?**

**What does the poet feel about the American, and about Dublin and Dubliners?**

**What have you learnt about the experience of living in Dublin?**

**Do you agree with the American?**

2. The House

Howard Wright

**Why does the poet use dialect?**

**What does the narrator (I) of the poem feel about his grandfather?**

**Why do you think the grandfather drank?**

**Why is the poem called 'The House'?**

**What do you learn about the grandfather's environment?**

**Why do you think the poet chose not to rhyme?**

### 3. My Father Perceived as a Vision of St Francis

Paula Meehan

**Why do you think the narrator of the poem is very aware of her surroundings?**

**What do you think she is feeling in the first stanza?**

**Why do you think the poet has set the poem at Autumn time?**

**How do you know what the narrator feels about her father?**

**How is the father like St Francis?**

**Why is it a sad poem?**

**What do you learn of the experience of living in Dublin?**

**What does the narrator feel about the experience of living in Dublin?**

### 4. The Pattern

Paula Meehan

**Explore the relationship the poet had with her mother when she was a child.**

**Explore the personality and life of the mother.**

**'The pattern' is an image for a way of life, not just a literal knitting pattern. Do you think it was hard for the mother to learn how to follow a pattern?**

**How do you know what the poet feels about her mother now?**

## 5. The Dowser and the Child

Tony Curtis

*A dowser is someone who can find supplies of water by instinct, perhaps magic.*

**What do you think the relationship is between the narrator, the child and the dowser?**

**What sort of person is the dowser?**

**What does the child feel about the dowser? Why does the child call her a dowser?**

**Think about why some sentences are long and some are short.**

**Why has the poet chosen water in nature as a central image?**

## 6. Going Home to Mayo, Winter, 1949

Paul Durcan

**How does the poet make the sense of childhood vivid on the journey?**

**What is the effect of the place names?**

**What is life like in the village?**

**Why does the child like this life?**

**How is it different from Dublin?**

**Look at the beginning and the end of the poem. How does the poet show his feelings about Dublin and its effect on people?**

**How do you know it is the poet as an adult feeling this, rather than the child?**

**How is this poem a lament showing a sense of loss?**

## 7. The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage

Paul Durcan

*Pearse is a common Irish name, but Irish readers would know that Patrick Pearse was a leader of a group called the Gaelic League. He campaigned to get Irish taught in schools and to create a new literature written in Irish. He himself wrote strong, lyrical poems in Gaelic. Pearse was involved in the Easter Rising of 1916 and was executed by an English firing squad on 3 May 1916, so he is a romantic figure.*

*El Greco was a Spanish artist whose paintings were full of emotion and drama.*

Why is it appropriate that the cottage should have belonged to Pearse?

How old do you guess the person telling the story is now?

Why was Cáit Killann so attractive?

How does Paul Durcan make the poem feel like a song or ballad?

Why does he do this?

How can you tell that this rural past was not as idyllic as it might have been?

How does he feel about himself at 16 and his first experience of love now?

This poem is about one incident in a man's life but how does it reveal the Irish experience in general?

## 8. The End of the Day

Tony Curtis

Explain how the farmer is feeling in the first 6 lines.

What does he remember and why does he remember it now?

What does he feel about being a farmer?

What does he feel about his father?

## 9. McGwinn and Son

Ted McNulty

**Explain how the butcher is feeling in the first four lines.**

**What does he remember and why does he remember it now?**

**Explain what he felt about becoming a butcher.**

**Why do you think he became one?**

**How did it change him?**

**How do you feel towards the butcher?**

**What do you learn of the environment of the village?**

**Why does Ted McNulty write the poem as just one sentence?**

## 10. Penance

Tony Curtis

**What atmosphere is created in the first stanza?**

**What is the significance of the religious imagery in stanza two?**

**What does the narrator feel about the place in stanza three?**

**Why do you think the poem is called 'Penance'?**

**What do you learn about the environment in this poem?**

*bog - peat, turf still used as fuel in homes in Ireland*  
*Cleggan - small fishing village in Connemara*

## 11. Yeats' Fisherman

Monica Hoyer

***It is impossible to describe how important Yeats is to Irish people, never mind Irish poetry. He was a very famous popular poet who felt passionately about Ireland, its history and its culture. Some of his poetry celebrates the simple, rural life.***

**Why do you think the poet uses rhyme in this poem?**

**Why does she use a straightforward pattern (4 stanzas, 4 lines in a stanza, and six syllables in a line, and three stresses in every line)?**

**What would life be like married to the fisherman?**

**Why would the poet enjoy the life?**

**What makes the poem sad and a bit angry?**

## 12. Voices

Damien Quinn

**What has just happened?**

**Why are the camera crews having a field day?**

**What does the poet feel about the camera crew?**

**What do you think the poet wants to do? (stanza 9)**

**Why does he think he will succeed no more than the camera crew?**

***(Jeune means immature and awkward.)***

**How does he describe the nature of the troubles?**

**Has he in fact failed or succeeded in making you learn about the experience of life in the North of Ireland?**

## 13. Northern Haiku

Tony Curtis

***The last line in a Haiku is always the eye opener, the line that stops you and makes you think. Each Haiku has 17 syllables.***

**Chose seven Haiku. Explain what they make you think and how they are written which helps to give them power.**

***For example, Haiku 1:***

***The first two lines are about a real physical feature, a wall built on typically Irish marshy soil.***

***The last line reveals it is also a political boundary dividing a place which should be whole - the land is the same on both sides.***

***This boundary was created by the past, by history. It is sad that the present has been harmed by the past.***

***All this is contained in three lines, which are made more effective because of the alliteration of P.***

**Why has the poet chosen to use the Haiku form?**

**What have you learnt about the experience of living in the North from these poems?**

## 14. Postcard from Fermanagh

Bill O'Keefe

**What is the person telling the story of the poem doing in Enniskillen?**

**What is the narrator doing in the first stanza?**

**How does that contrast with the first line?**

**How is the first line made to surprise you?**

**What is the phrase 'nosing the forest' telling you about the scout? (stanza 2)**

**Why does the poet use a metaphor, to compare the gunship with a hawk? (stanza 2)**

**How does the last line of stanza 3 contrast with the first 3 lines? (How is the soldier talking to the narrator?)**

**How does the word 'disgorges' make you think of the Red Orion?**

**What do you think the poet means by the last stanza?**

**Would you want to return to Enniskillen?**

**What have you learned of the experience of living in Northern Ireland from this poem?**

## 15. Enemy Encounter

Padraic Fiacc

**How is a mood created in the first stanza?**

**How do you know what the poet feels about the soldier?**

**How do you know what the soldier feels about the poet?**

**Why is it a sad poem?**

**What have you learnt about the experience of living in the north of Ireland from this poem?**

## 16. The Disturbance

Tony Curtis

**Why are the men compared to convicts or farmers?**

**Why are the women compared to flowers?**

**What effect would a bomb have if it exploded in your street?**

**What effect has the bomb and the troubles on their lives?**

**How do you know what the man who detonated the bomb feels?**

**What have you learnt about the experience of living in Northern Ireland from this poem?**

## 17. Follower

Seamus Heaney

**Why do you think the poet describes his father's shoulders as 'globed like a full sail strung between the shafts and the furrow'?**

**What does the young Heaney envy about his father?**

**What happens when the young Heaney follows his father behind the plough and then on the farm?**

**Why is the poem called 'follower'?**

## 18. Digging

Seamus Heaney

**How can you tell that Heaney admires his father's skill?**

**Is there anything mechanical in the way Heaney's father works?**

**Can you see anything in the layout and punctuation of the poem that reminds you of the movement involved in digging?**

**Although he is a poet, how does Heaney feel linked to his father and grandfather?**

**Why do you think the poet uses the simile 'snug as a gun' to describe his pen at the start of the poem?**

## 19. The Country Fiddler

## 20. The Cage

John Montague

*John Montague was born in New York, like Frank McCourt. In the following extract from Frank McCourt's novel Angela's Ashes (set in the nineteen thirties), McCourt's mother takes her children and searches desperately through Brooklyn for her husband who has left his family without food or warmth. Here McCourt enters a bar or 'speakeasy' looking for his father:*

It's dark on Atlantic Avenue and all the bars around the Long island Railroad Station are bright and noisy. We go from bar to bar looking for Dad. Mam leaves us outside with the pram while she goes in or sends me. There are crowds of noisy men and stale smells that remind me of Dad when he comes home with the smell of whiskey on him.

The man behind the bar says, Yeah, sonny, whaddya want? You're not supposeta be in here, y'know.

I'm looking for my father. Is my father here?

Naw, sonny, how'd I know dat? Who's your fawdah?

His name is Malachy and he sings Kevin Barry.

Malarkey?

No. Malachy

Malachy? And he sings Kevin Barry?

He calls out to the men in the bar, Youse guys, youse know guy Malachy what sings Kevin Barry?

Men shake their heads. One says he knew a guy Michael sang Kevin Barry but he died of the drink which he had because of his war wounds.

The barman says, Jeez, Pete, I didn't ax ya to tell me history of da woild, did I? Naw, kid. We don't let people sing in here. Causes trouble. Specially the Irish. Let 'em sing, next the fists are flying. Besides I never hold a name like dat Malachy. Naw, kid, no Malachy here.

The man called Pete holds his glass towards me. Here, kid, have a sip, but the barman says, Whaddya doin, Pete? Tryina get the kid drunk? Do that again, Pete, an I'll come out an break y'ass.

Mam tries all the bars around the station before she gives up. She leans against a wall and cries. Jesus, we still have to walk all the way to Classon Avenue and I have four starving children. She sends me back into the bar where Pete offered me the sip to see if the barman would fill the twin's bottles with water and maybe a little sugar in each. The men in the bar think it's very funny that the barman should be filling baby bottles but he's big and he tells them shut their lip. He tells me babies should be drinking milk not water and when I tell him mam doesn't have the money he empties the baby bottles and fills them with milk. He says, Tell ya mom they need that for the teeth and bones. Ya drink water an' sugar an' all ya get is rickets. Tell ya Mom.

Mam is happy with the milk. She says she knows all about teeth and bones and rickets but beggars can't be choosers.

Now read 'The Country Fiddler'.

**In your own words, explain what the uncle's life was like in Ireland.**

**How do you think life running a speakeasy contrasted with the uncle's life in Ireland?**

**The poet's uncle did not take his fiddle with him to America. Look again at stanza six. How do you think this stanza could be seen as a *metaphor*?**

**What link does the poet feel he has with his uncle?**

Now read 'The Cage'.

**How do you think the poet's father's life in America was different from his life in Ireland?**

**Why do you think the poem is called 'The Cage'?**

**Compare 'The Cage' with 'The Country Fiddler'. What links the poet's uncle with his father in terms of their experience of emigration to America?**

***Odysseus - from Homer's poem 'Odyssey'. Odysseus voyaged for twelve years and had many adventures including encounters with the Cyclops and the Sirens***

***Telemachus - Odysseus's son who helps his father to kill his mother's suitors on his return from his twelve year voyage!***

## 21. Father and son

F.R. Higgins

***F.R. Higgins lived from 1896-1941. He influenced and was influenced by W.B. Yeats.***

**What atmosphere is created by the phrase ‘the shadowed leadened flight of a heron’?**

**What does the poet mean by ‘I went unmanly with grief’?**

**What does the poet mean when he describes his father as ‘sole signet of his race’?**

**What kind of man was the poet’s father. (Look at the third, fourth and final verses in particular.)**

**Death is personified in the poem. Do you think Death’s ‘grey blind’ is an effective image?**

**Why do you think ‘no bird breaks’ the ‘graven silence’ in the last line?**

## 22. My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold

William Wordsworth

**What links the poet's childhood to his adulthood?**

**Why do you think his heart 'leaps up' when he sees a rainbow?**

**What do you think he means when he writes 'The Child is father of the Man'?**

## 23. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood *(extract)*

William Wordsworth

**Why does the first stanza of the poem end in such a gloomy or melancholy way?**

**Why is our birth 'but a sleep and a forgetting'?**

**If 'heaven lies about us in our infancy' why do 'shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy'?**

**Why do you think the youth 'still is Nature's Priest'?**

**According to stanza VII what worldly things replace Nature in the growing boy? What is the poet's attitude towards these changes?**

*intimation - an implication or hint*

*apparelled - dressed*

*whence - from where*

*fretted - (1) worn away*

*(2) when a child is fretful it is distressed*

*sallies - to 'sally forth' is to rush forward as soldiers do in battle*

*con - its old fashioned meaning is 'to learn by heart'*

*palsied - paralysed*

*equipage - necessary equipment or clothing for a task*

## 24. Anecdote for Fathers

William Wordsworth

**Why do you think the poet's son gives such a strange reply?**

**Why do you think the poet seems so pleased with his son's reply?**

**Do you think that young children have things to teach us as we get older?**

## 25. Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Thomas Gray

Look at the first seven stanzas of the poem. What occupations did those now sleeping in their graves once have in life?

What do you make of the line at the end of the ninth stanza: 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave'?

Look at stanzas 12 to 16. What might those now lying in their graves have been if circumstances had been different?

Is there some consolation for them in not having achieved greater things? Look at stanzas 17 to 19.

Gray does not seem to think much of the poems or epitaphs written on people's headstones but, he admits, they *do* have a purpose. What is that purpose?

*It might seem odd to write about death humorously but often laughter can help us to accept the final certainty! Here are some cheeky and irreverent epitaphs. Needless to say they are anonymous! Try to invent some of your own.*

Poor Martha Snell, she's gone away,  
She would if she could, but she couldn't stay;  
She'd two bad legs and a baddish cough,  
But her legs it was that carried her off.



Here lies one who for medicine would not give  
A little gold, and so his life he lost:  
I fancy now he'd wish to live  
Could he but guess how much his funeral cost.



Reader, pass on! - don't waste your time  
On bad biography and bitter rhyme;  
For what I am, this cumbrous clay insures,  
And what I was is no affair of yours.



*The sensitive should close their eyes before reading this one:*

Here lies the body of Mary Charlotte.  
Born a virgin, died a harlot.  
Until sixteen she kept her virginity,  
Which is a record in this vicinity.



*And for the sake of some equality:*

Here lies Bill Dodge  
Who dodged all good  
And dodged a deal of evil  
But after dodging all he could  
He could not dodge the Devil.

26. Elegiac Stanzas in Memory of my Brother,  
John Wordsworth William Wordsworth

*William Wordsworth is sometimes referred to as a nature poet because many of his poems reflect the environment of the Lake District where he lived.*

What other natural environment does the poet describe in contrast to the sea where his brother was lost?

*How* are the two environments contrasted?

In the second, fifth and sixth stanzas Wordsworth uses the image of a flower. The flower is a metaphor for his brother yet possesses a power of its own. Can you explain this further?

27. In Memory of Major Robert Gregory W.B. Yeats

*Major Gregory was the only son of Yeats's friend Lady Gregory. An Irishman, he flew for the British air force (then known as the Royal Flying Corps) in World War One. He was killed on the Italian front on 23rd January 1918. Sometime afterwards it was discovered that he had been shot down in error by an Italian pilot. (Yeats also wrote another poem about Major Gregory entitled 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Own Death'.)*

At what kinds of activities did Major Gregory excel in life?

What potential could Major Gregory have fulfilled had he not died?

Does Yeats speak only for himself in mourning Major Gregory?

How at the end of the poem is Yeats's mood matched by the weather? (This technique is sometimes referred to as 'pathetic fallacy'.)

*'almost settled in our house' - Yeats and his wife were living in a house lent to them by Lady Gregory whilst their own was being refurbished*  
*Lionel Johnson - a poet and member of the Rhymers' Club, a group who used to meet in the Cheshire Cheese pub in London's Fleet Street*  
*John Synge (pronounced: 'sing') - an Irish playwright who lived from 1871-1909*  
*George Polloxfen (1839-1910) - Yeats's uncle*  
*Our Sidney - Yeats compares Major Gregory to the Elizabethan courtier, soldier and author, Philip Sidney (1554-86) who was killed in battle.*

## 28. In Memory of W.B. Yeats (d. Jan. 1939)

W.H. Auden

**How does the weather reflect the mood of this poem?**

**Why does Auden suggest that now he is dead, Yeats is 'scattered among a hundred cities'?**

**What does Auden suggest about Yeats's relationship with Ireland?**

**'For poetry makes nothing happen.' Seamus Heaney described these words as 'perhaps the most often quoted and most frequently misrepresented lines Auden ever wrote', but they hang gloomily over the poem. Why do you think Auden included these lines? Do you agree with him?**

***Bourse - money market, Paris equivalent of the Stock Exchange  
silly - This word has changed in meaning over the centuries. It now means 'foolish'. It once meant 'blessed', 'innocent' and 'helpless'. Could Auden be employing a pun here?***

## 29. Elegy

Seamus Heaney

*Read the extract (printed on the same page) from Robert Lowell's 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket' which is also an elegy! In the Atlantic waters lurks the corpse of the drowned sailor, perhaps Warren Winslow for whom the poem was written. Look at the way in which Lowell bends and stretches language to create effects. It is no wonder that Seamus Heaney admired him. Why do you think the poet has chosen 'hurdling' to describe the dead man's thigh muscles? Why does he have 'marble' feet? Why has the poet opened with a three line biblical quote from the Book of Genesis?*

*Ahab - the dark and mysterious captain of the Pequod in Herman Melville's 'Moby Dick'*

*portent - an omen or sign of something to come*

*deity - a god*

*bulwark - the side of the ship above the deck; a sea defence on land*

*Orphean lute - Orpheus, a mythical Greek poet, played the lute so well that when his wife Eurydice died she was allowed to return from the Underworld on the condition that Orpheus walk ahead of her and not look back. He did look back and she was lost irretrievably.*

Now look at 'Elegy' by Seamus Heaney.

Why does Heaney call Lowell a 'welder of English'?

'Water-breaking' is a compound adjective. How has Heaney tried to use language in a similar way to Lowell? Why is this a sign of his admiration for Lowell?

What do you think Heaney means by 'your dorsal nib'?

What picture do you get from Heaney's poem of the way in which Lowell lived life? Look at his phrase 'You drank America like the heart's iron vodka' and his pun 'the geranium tremens'.

Having read the poem, you will realise that Heaney and Lowell spent some time together. Why do you think Heaney liked Lowell?

*promulgating - making known to the public, proclaiming*

*inveigle - to entice, tempt or persuade*

*retiarius - a Roman gladiator using a net to trap an opponent*

*opulent - rich, wealthy*

## 30. Casualty

Seamus Heaney

***This poem is Heaney's elegy to his uncle killed by a terrorist bomb. The bomb was planted in retaliation for the killing of thirteen nationalist demonstrators by British troops on 30 January 1972, an event which has come to be called 'Bloody Sunday'.***

Heaney uses a simile to describe the coffins of the thirteen dead demonstrators which 'seemed to float ... *Like blossoms on slow water.*' Why is this simile effective?

In what ways does Heaney show his uncle to be an ordinary man?

What did his uncle's friendship mean to the poet?

What does Heaney mean when he writes that on the evening he was killed, his uncle 'broke our tribe's complicity'?

Why do you think Heaney describes the mourners at his uncle's funeral as 'Those quiet walkers and sideways talkers'?

Think about the *tone* of the poem. How does it reveal Heaney's attitude towards his uncle's death?

Part five

## Paths to poetry

## 31. Images of Ireland and beyond

Look at the list of words below.

In a small group, choose the five or six words which you consider best some up the character of the Irish.

Then, collate your results as a class. Which are the most popular five words? Add others of your own.

friendly	stupid	relaxed	musical
humorous	lucky	creative	sentimental
complaining	violent	religious	welcoming
poetic	drunken	traditional	witty
crafty	cool	softly spoken	witty
loquacious (talkative)	hi-tech	superstitious	

THINK OF HOW EASILY PEOPLE ARE STEREOTYPED.

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES OF PEOPLE IN YOUR AREA HELD BY OUTSIDERS?

IS THERE ANY TRUTH BEHIND THESE STEREOTYPES?

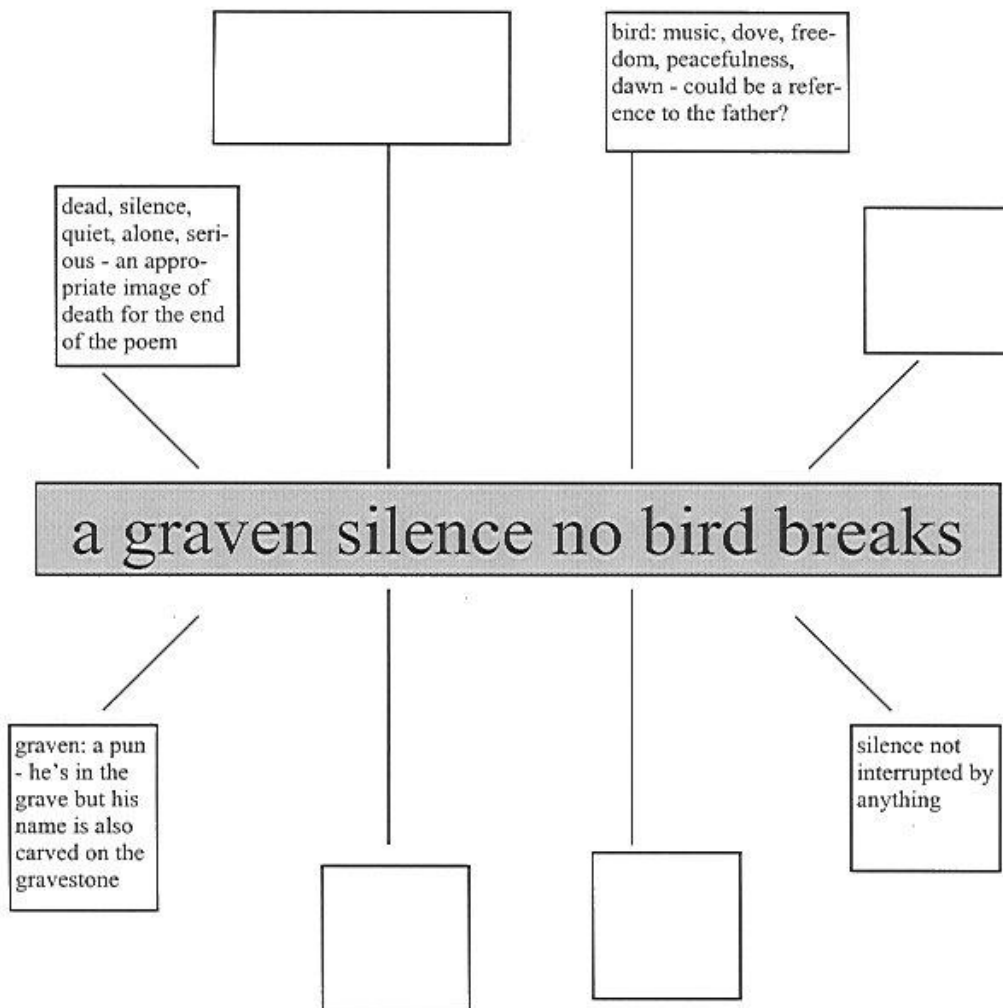
HOW CAN WE COUNTER STEREOTYPES?





### 33. Brainstorming

a line from F.R. Higgins, 'Father and Son'



**SPLIT INTO GROUPS OF THREE OR FOUR. ONE MEMBER OF THE GROUP READS ALOUD A LINE FOR THE WHOLE GROUP TO BRAINSTORM. IT SHOULD BE A LINE WHERE THE MEANING IS NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD OR IMMEDIATELY CLEAR TO THE GROUP.**

**WRITE THE LINE IN THE MIDDLE OF A LARGE PIECE OF PAPER. TAKING EACH OF THE MAIN CONTENT WORDS IN THE LINE ONE AT A TIME, EACH MEMBER OF THE GROUP SAYS WHAT THE WORD MAKES THEM THINK OF, THAT IS, WHAT THEY ASSOCIATE WITH IT.**

**LOOK AT THE LIST OF WORDS AND ASSOCIATIONS YOU HAVE GATHERED. CAN YOU SEE ANY PATTERNS OR LINKS BETWEEN THEM? SHARE YOUR RESULTS WITH OTHER IN THE CLASS WHO ARE CONSIDERING THE SAME LINE. BY THE TIME YOU HAVE FINISHED YOU SHOULD HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF THE MOOD, ATMOSPHERE OR TONE THE POET IS TRYING TO CREATE.**

**THE ABOVE EXAMPLE WAS COMPILED BY MEMBERS OF 10GZ AT CALDAY GRANGE GRAMMAR SCHOOL. BOXES ARE LEFT OPEN FOR YOU TO ADD YOUR OWN WORDS.**

## 34. GCSE oral assignments

**Choose one of the following GCSE oral assignments:**

Option 1

Marked on 25

You have been asked by the makers of GCSE Bitesize to present a radio or TV programme about poetry.



**The programme makers know that simply having a teacher talking for 15 minutes about the poems does not help many students. A more lively approach, perhaps RAISING as well as answering questions would be more helpful.**

**Work in groups of three.**

**Choose three poems from numbers 1 to 16 of the anthology.**

**The programme should contain:**

- ❖ a reading of each poem
- ❖ a discussion of the poems - including your well-justified opinions of each
- ❖ suggested questions and ways of studying the poems in more detail.

**The programme should last no more than fifteen minutes and should be recorded on audio or video tape.**

Option 2

Marked on 25

Desert Island Poems: individual work and in groups of three

**Desert Island Discs is a long running radio programme which invites famous people to imagine which pieces of music they would take with them for entertainment if they were to be marooned on a far away desert island! They usually choose music which has affected them emotionally or which carries with it particular memories.**



- ❖ Select your favourite three poems from numbers 1 to 16 of the anthology
- ❖ Present each poem to the two other people in your group, saying why you have chosen it.

**Be detailed. Say what the poem is about., which words you think are particularly effective and why? Does it remind you of an experience you have had or of something else you have read?**

Option 3

Marked on 25

Make a dramatic presentation of a poem: groups of three

**You will need to choose a poem that would benefit from a visual interpretation.**

**You should include a reading of the whole poem as part of your presentation but it could involve different voices reading different parts or it could be accompanied by drama or music. The idea is to bring out the poem's content and mood to the full.**



**Marks will be awarded for a *sympathetic interpretation* of the poem which *helps us to understand* the feelings in it.**

## 35. GCSE oral work

You're the judge!

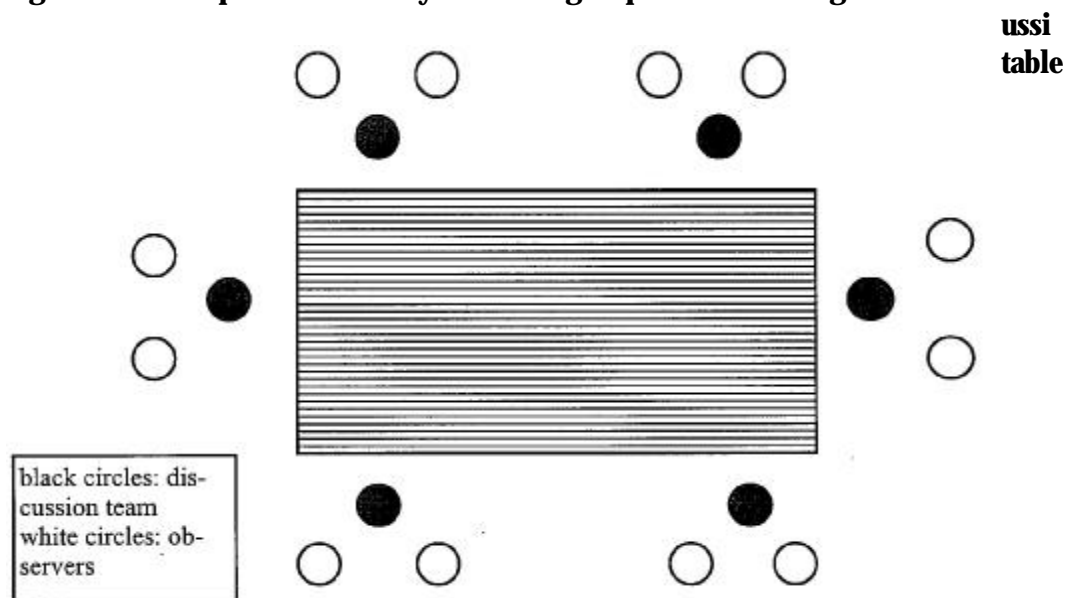
### 1. TASK

You will be allocated a poem from the poetry anthology 'Crossing the Irish Sea' that has not already been discussed in class. Your job will be to talk about it as a group. Each member of the main discussion team (black circles) will have two observers. The observers' job will be to take notes and to report on the participation of the main group member behind whom they are sitting. As a judge, it might help to have a copy of the GCSE oral criteria in front of you so that you can give a grade. Your teacher will give you a copy.

Once each poem has been discussed, the groups and observers will be changed. Most people will be given the chance play the part of discussion team member and observer.

### 2. DISPOSITIONS

The diagram below represents the way in which groups will be arranged around the discussion table.



### 3. WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT?

Before you begin, the poem should be read aloud. Either:

*read a verse or stanza each*

or (if the poem is not divided in this way)

*change reader at full stops, question marks or exclamation marks.*

Whichever way you choose, if mistakes are made the first time the group reads the poem, read it again until you are happy that the listeners would not be put off by errors or hesitation.

Now, the success of the assignment is up to you! You will have discussed in class what to look out for in a poem but you might talk about:

- ❖ what you think the poem is about
- ❖ who you think is 'speaking' in the poem; is it the poet or someone else
- ❖ why you like the poem
- ❖ why you hate the poem!
- ❖ which words you think work well and why
- ❖ the order in which the poem as been put together
- ❖ whether you can see any connection with the other poems we have looked at in the collection.

*Remember, not everyone will say equal amounts in the discussion. The important thing is to join in and try your best! Use the lines below to record your evaluation of the assignment.*

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Part six

# Assignments

## 37. Assignments

### A. SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

#### 1. Religion and Irish poetry

**Choose four poems and show how religion has affected the way the poet sees the world.**

**You may think about:**

**the securities produced by religion  
escaping from the confinement of religion  
how religion is part of the Northern Ireland troubles  
how parents are part of the religious culture  
how religion is part of poets' imagery and language.**

#### 2. Dublin and contemporary Irish poetry

**Look at the three poems:**

**My Father Perceived as a Vision of St Francis  
Going Home to Mayo, Winter, 1949  
A Tourist Comments on the Land of his Forefathers**

**Show how the poets feel about the City of Dublin and the role of their fathers, or forefathers in this response to the city.**

#### 3. Rural landscape and contemporary Irish poetry

**Choose three or four poems about rural Ireland.  
How do the poets describe the landscape and the life?  
What do they feel about this environment?  
Compare and contrast any attitudes.**

#### 4. 'The troubles' and contemporary Irish poetry

**Which three or four poems make you think the most about 'the troubles' in Ireland?  
How do they achieve this?  
What do the poets or narrators feel about the situation?**

#### 5. Emigration, exile and contemporary Irish poetry

**Look at the three poems:**

**The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage  
The Country Fiddler**

## **The Cage.**

**Read the extract from *Angela's Ashes* printed on page 21 of this booklet.**

**How do the writers use language to show the effects on people of leaving their country of birth?**

### **B. LITERARY TRADITION**

#### **6. The elegy**

**Explore the ways in which poets on both sides of the Irish Sea have expressed themselves by writing elegies.**

**Consider elegies written for ordinary people as well as those written for famous figures.**

#### **7. Parents and children in Irish and English poetry**

**'The Child is the Father to the Man.' (William Wordsworth)**

**How have poets throughout the years sought to explore the relationship between parents and children?**

**What common features can you find in their different approaches?**