

Two poems from the collection THE PERFECT POEM, published 2010.

The Perfect Poem

I wrote the perfect poem
Once in a dream and I watched it
Amazed on the screen like a man who had never seen
A typewriter, let alone a computer.
I printed it out, I pressed delete
And carried the sheet of paper to my car
And drove out into Erris far
Beyond the wilderness of bogs and mountain forests
To the Mullet and a lonely beach I knew
From taking children there when they were young.
It was the dawn of my day.
I watched the children play and the sand
On their mother's feet and I loved her,
Every wriggley toe
But she was silent, thinking,
And something in her silence told me not to read
My perfect poem to her,
It knew our wordless secrets.
I tore the paper into shreds and walked
To the edge of waves and threw the pieces to the foam
And watched them swirl there like bread thrown
To hungry birds...
But the birds stayed in the sky, unmoved, unblinking
And the mother of my children watched all in silence
Thinking.
And the waves, washed, on the pebbly, shore.
And the perfect words, of my perfect poem,
Were there, no more.
But it was the perfect poem,
I called out to my woman, sadly.
She shook her head and waved
Her arm at our children playing beside the water.
We will wait here until dark, she said.
But the children will get cold.
She grinned and wriggled her toes and shook her head.
Oh yes it will be dark, she said, and cold

But the children will be grown and old in their own lives
And we their stars and their ocean.
She looked then to my eyes and whispered,
The mystery of their stars, the silence of their ocean.
Wait with me.

MULLAFARRY

(For Karen Smith, who watched the birds)

I passed a dead blackbird on the road today
Up Mullafarry way and wondered
What did it mean,
That splattered splay of a feathery life
Scratched out by some artistic God,
And what's that all about?
Perhaps St Patrick knew!
He spoke to tribes up there, or so they say,
On Mullagh Hill, laid down the law
To my shaggy ancestors
Gathered in from Erris for the day.
(I see them still, that lot,
At Mart or Match, muttering
Groups of damp, boggy, silent, buckos,
Their squint eyes looking sideways at it all.)
Yes perhaps St Patrick knew
The song of that bird in the hedge
And the silence when it sang no more
Perhaps.
I drive on, carefully, to visit Karen's grave
Up Mullafarry way, that winding road
Is steep and dangerous as life itself,
Threaded between birdsong and silence.