



The T S Eliot Prize 2009

Reading Groups: *Through the Square Window*

Sinéad Morrissey was born in Portadown, Co Armagh, in 1972 and grew up in Belfast. She is the author of three previous collections: *There Was Fire in Vancouver* (1996), *Between Here and There* (2002) and *The State of the Prisons* (2005). Her awards include the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Rupert and Eithne Strong Award and the Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize. She is lecturer in creative writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, Queen's University, Belfast. *Through the Square Window* (Carcanet) is the Poetry Book Society Winter Choice and the title poem won the 2008 National Poetry Competition.



Through the Square Window *

In my dream the dead have arrived
to wash the windows of my house.
There are no blinds to shut them out with.

The clouds above the Lough are stacked
like the clouds are stacked above Delft.
They have the gluttoned look of clouds over water.

The heads of the dead are huge. I wonder
if it's my son they're after, his
effortless breath, his ribbon of years –

but he sleeps on unregarded in his cot,
inured, it would seem, quite naturally
to the sluicing and battering and paring back of glass

that delivers this shining exterior...
One blue boy holds a rag in his teeth
between panes like a conjuror.

And then, as suddenly as they came, they go.
And there is a horizon
from which only the clouds stare in,

the massed canopies of Hazelbank,
the severed tip of the Strangford Peninsula,
and a density in the room I find it difficult to breathe in

until I wake, flat on my back with a cork
in my mouth, bottle-stoppered, in fact,
like a herbalist's cure for dropsy.

* *Through the Square Window* won first place in the UK National Poetry Competition in 2007.

History

Dear Heart, I dreamed a territory so seeming rich
and decorous, I woke with all its workings on my tongue.
Napoleon vanquished Europe. But when he died
(of natural causes) on the Palace-Garden Isle, Isola Bella,
built to resemble the rigging of ships, the map changed colour
from the Bay of Biscay to the Carpathian Peaks as bloodlessly
as the delicate octopus its rippling skin. The world shrugged off
his atheistic scarlet and dipped itself in yellow, the yellow of egg-
yolk and daylight's origin, and a Golden Age let down its iron bridge
and set us travelling. Everywhere was the same: commerce
was encouraged (though not excessively); order and cleanliness
governed and dignified both public and private realms; music
and poetry could be heard in all quarters. In Spain itself, the centre
of the Empire, all were as one: Language, Religion, the Crafts of State,
and the people flourished and were happy, the sap in the veins
of a Body Politick in rigorous health. Women, ever the lynchpin,
of households and families, of the men who bear the imperial message
like a lamp into the dark, wore their mantle lightly, were softly
spoken, modestly attired, and though at liberty to work and roam
abroad, turned all their passion inwards to their sons and homes...

Dear Heart,

travelling through Switzerland in a previous summer, we stopped
in Berne and witnessed the *Zytglogge*: a medieval tower of time.
Beneath its east main face is an intricate astronomical and astrological
device, wherein, in one small radius, are displayed:
all twenty-four hours, the hours of brightness, the days
of the week, our position in the zodiac, the date, the month, the progress
of the moon and the degree of elevation of the sun on the horizon.
It was raining that straightforward, European rain we seldom see
at home and a small crowd murmured to their umbrellas
as Caspar Brunner's parade of bears, Chronos with his hourglass,
and a grinning jester in cap and bells rattled out of the darkness
four minutes to the hour. And my dream was like this –
as these eight signposts to our mortal existences
clicked and chimed together, so the interlocking arms
of God and Man and Government danced flawlessly there.
What measure of exactness could keep my golden territory
intact and accurate to the second? That same year, but later,
a woman read my fortune in a brace of cards. One showed a cup,
for love, and another a blinded girl, and another a hill of wheels
and gibbets, stood stark against the sky as the Saviour's Cross.

Missing Winter

The clocks have been set back
and suddenly morning
is safeguarded again:
birds on the Lough
like guests at a wedding.

Though the four o'clock dark
is massed, obliterating –
winter come careening
in storms over the Shore Park,
its hair undone and the back door banging.

Last year I missed this slippage
completely: five weeks in
to our botched conversation

of doorways and diptychs, of wreckage,
of howling, and he unknown,

his arrival so fast,
his skin had been lost
in transit, tossed off
in an anteroom of umbrellas and hats
like the overnight pupation of the gypsy moth.

He had to re-grow it,
moon-ring by moon-ring;
his intestine spasmed on everything
fed to him... That bathtub light,
the plug hauled out and draining

a whole hour sooner
than expected, contained within its glint and grain
one singular disastrous kitchen,
a screaming boy abandoned on the floor,
and me, no longer listening,

but thinking instead of storks –
land-herons, monogamists,
as attached to their rooftop nests
as to their partners, legs like two forks
trailing in a headwind and blessed,

above all creatures, with sex –
and I wished the stork back,
with its bundle-used beak
and impossible kindnesses –
I wished the stork back.

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