

“WE DONE OUR BEST WHEN WE WERE LET”:  
JAMES LIDDY’S *ARENA*, 1963–1965

by Thomas Dillon Redshaw

The four issues of James Liddy’s *Arena* represent well the renewed maturity of Irish small magazine and literary publishing in the mid-1960s. The pages of *Arena* reveal, as well, a tension latent in mid-century Irish writing between a mandarin, almost academic fealty to modes of the Irish Revival and a Bohemian, even “Beat” romance with American innovation. Literary and small-press publishing in the Republic of Ireland slipped out of the doldrums of the “Emergency” only at the start of the 1960s, right on the heels of the new economic policies devised by Thomas K. Whitaker and Taoiseach Seán Lemass. Even so, the turn of the postwar decade (1948–1953), saw an efflorescence of literary magazines that vied to supplant *The Bell*. Subtitled *A Survey of Irish Life*, Sean O’Faolain’s and, later, Peadar O’Donnell’s *The Bell* invigorated Irish letters for twelve years between 1940 and 1950. For example, John Ryan’s *Envoy* (1949–1951) complemented the long-running *Dublin Magazine* (1923–1958).<sup>1</sup> As Tom Clyde’s *Irish Literary Magazines* (2003) now so essentially documents, two little magazines edited by David Marcus—*Irish Writing* and *Poetry Ireland*—complemented and then continued the traditions of *The Bell*.<sup>2</sup> Published first from Cork and then from Dublin, *Irish Writing* (1946–1957) returned as the literary page of the *Irish Press* (1968–1988) and then of the *Dublin Sunday Tribune*. Marcus also edited the first *Poetry Ireland* (1948–1955), which was revived by Liam Miller’s Dolmen Press (1962–1968) and then in 1978 by John F. Deane to become *Poetry Ireland Review* in 1981. As Clyde observes, the magazines of this first flush of renewed literary expression in the South

were striving toward a new level of complexity and maturity, looking outside Ireland for examples of best practice; the spirits of belle-lettrism, patriotic versifying and parochial amateurism may not have been banished in this era, but notice had definitely been served.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1950s, Liam Miller and his nascent Dolmen Press were beginning to “serve notice” and to receive good notices for doing so. By 1960 Miller had completed, with the encouragement of Robert Gibbings, the typographic experiments of *The Dolmen Chapbook* and he had issued Kinsella’s *Another September* (March, 1958) and John Montague’s *Forms of Exile* (May, 1959). In the opening years of the 1960s Miller followed these accomplishments with Richard Murphy’s *The Last Galway Hooker* (May, 1961), Austin Clarke’s signal collection *Later Poets* (June, 1961), and James Liddy’s Joycean oration *Esau, My Kingdom for a Drink* (June, 1962). The Dolmen Press played a key role in a second postwar efflorescence of literary magazines in Dublin.<sup>4</sup> From Miller’s office or drawing room, and from his design table or his press, came the revival of *Poetry Ireland* (1962–1968) under John Jordan’s editorship, Patricia McCarthy’s short-lived but avant-garde *nonplus* (1959–1960), and *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing* (September, 1962).<sup>5</sup>

Published in September, 1962—six months before the first issue of *Arena*—the *Dolmen Miscellany* never achieved a second issue, though the issue number on the spine suggests that Miller and the editors intended at least annual publication. In *Dolmen XXV* (1976), Miller suggests that the periodical miscellany turned out to be an outmoded genre belonging to the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Even so, the *Miscellany* was widely distributed in Ireland and in Britain and North America by Oxford University Press. Still to be found in used bookstores, the *Miscellany* offers a pertinent view of Irish writing verging on the cusp of the 1965 Yeats Centenary and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising.<sup>7</sup> John Montague “edited” the prose in the *Miscellany* by Brian Moore, Aidan Higgins, John Jordan, Montague himself, John McGahern, and James Plunkett. Thomas Kinsella is listed as poetry editor, though Montague likely had a hand in the selection of poems by Kinsella, himself, Pearse Hutchinson, Richard Weber, Richard Murphy, Valentin Iremonger, and James Liddy. Indeed, the spare cover design of the *Miscellany* lists all these names. That design also anticipates Miller’s “official” public style that he came to use for National Museum catalogues and for the *Yeats Papers*.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the *Miscellany* opens with a manifesto drafted by John Montague, as suggested by the humor of this aside: “In such a context, a little solemnity may be a revolutionary gesture.”<sup>9</sup> Montague serves notice that the *Miscellany* represents a “general change of sensibility” in literary Dublin in that this generation of writers works “towards a more experimental form” and seeks to “avoid forms of ‘Irishism’ (whether leprechaun or garrulous rebel).” Even in its manifesto, the *Miscellany*’s tone proves more mandarin than bohemian.

Part book, part periodical, *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing* has a hermaphroditic character echoed in Miller’s setting of the title, giving *the Dolmen* in display type and in gray-blue and *miscellany of Irish writing* in smaller type and in black. One version of Miller’s *Dolmen Press* mark appears in gray-blue at the bottom of the cover. At this juncture, for Liam Miller and his generation of Irish writers, one early step had been taken in the Dolmen Press’s evolution from being an exercise in fine press work to being a nearly commercial, literary publishing house—the most prestigious in Ireland. The term *miscellany* suggests, though, that the emerging literary ethos of Miller’s enterprise was at once both Bohemian and conservative in character. Indeed, the term embodies several aspects of Irish cultural history—none of them particularly populist. The term captures something of the traditions of criticism passed on from Yeats, Pound, and Eliot through such critics as Empson, Leavis, and Donald Davie, who was then teaching at Trinity College. Likewise, the term alludes to Anglo-Catholic culture represented by the writers and artists who gathered around Eric Gill in the 1930s and 1940s, including David Jones and Gill’s son-in-law René Hague, then living in County Cork.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the term also evokes the Catholic Thomist Revival high culture extant in Ireland between 1930 and 1960 or so, and represented by such figures as Msgr. Pádraig de Brún (1889–1960) and the poet Denis Devlin (1908–1959). Interestingly, the size and red cover of *The Dolmen Miscellany* echoes the size and red cover of *Studies*, the Irish Jesuit quarterly.

The mandarin critical streak of *The Dolmen Miscellany* was anticipated in the Bauhaus or Art Deco spirit of Patricia Murphy’s pocket journal *nonplus*, as Miller’s design for it suggests. Murphy edited only four issues of *nonplus* between 1958 and 1960. As Clyde notes, Murphy selected both political articles—on Irish foreign policy or Hubert Butler on Sarajevo—and articles on history and existentialism—Patrick Kavanagh on the Gaelic

# the Dolmen

miscellany of Irish writing

John Montague *editor*; Thomas Kinsella *poetry editor*

Aidan Higgins  
Pearse Hutchinson  
Valentin Iremonger  
John Jordan  
Thomas Kinsella  
James Liddy  
John McGahern  
John Montague  
Brian Moore  
Richard Murphy  
James Plunkett  
Richard Weber



a Dolmen Press book \$2.50

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WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF THE IRISH ACADEMY OF LETTERS

*The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing*, ed. John Montague, Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, September 1962). Note the prominence of the Dolmen Press mark, the citation of The Irish Academy of Letters, and the line identifying Oxford University Press as copublisher.

Athletic Association or on Camus or Heidegger.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, counting the excerpts from Myles na gCopaleen's "Cruiskeen Lawn" columns in the *Irish Times*, Kavanagh's article constitutes the parochial exception to the high-toned internationalist stance of *nonplus*. The cover of the last issue (Winter, 1960) features a montage of photographs of the Rising, of barricades, of Sackville Street in ruins.

The self-consciously intellectual, nearly ideological facet of *The Dolmen Miscellany's* character appeared again in a family of journals all having a similar format. The first to appear was the Belfast-based *Northern Review* (1965–1967); the second was the Dublin magazine *Atlantis* (1970–1974); and the last was *The Crane Bag* (1977–1985), a long-running biannual published from Dublin. Against the background "Troubles" in the North, these publications took on a revisionist, theoretically driven edge that gained expression in the later Field Day pamphlets and then in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1989).

Likewise, the mandarin character of *The Dolmen Miscellany* came to be expressed in Liam Miller's reincarnation of Marcus's *Poetry Ireland*. Quite clearly, the model was the Chicago-based monthly *Poetry*, founded by Harriet Monroe. *Poetry* and *Poetry Ireland* share a small format (20.2 x 13.75 cms.), page count, and cover design. *Poetry's* cover features a fluent Pegasus drawn by Harriet Rago while *Poetry Ireland* features a similarly posed Harpy drawn by Ruth Brandt (1936–1989), wife of the artist Michael Kane.<sup>12</sup> The editor from the start in 1962 was John Jordan (1930–1988) backed up by three Dolmen writers—James Liddy, James J. McAuley, and Richard Weber—in the first four issues. With the departure of Jordan from Ireland, Liam Miller decided to transform *Poetry Ireland* into *Poetry Ireland Editions* and handed the last double issue of the magazine off to John Montague. To the submissions approved by John Jordan, Montague added an essay by Thomas Kinsella: "Irish Literature—Continuity of the Tradition," a version of his ringing 1966 address to the Modern Languages Association in New York. Kinsella closes his essay with the oft-quoted assertion that "every writer in the modern world . . . is the inheritor of a gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition."<sup>13</sup>

Many of the gaps and discontinuities felt by Kinsella went unremarked in Irish popular and political culture until the outbreak of the "Troubles" in the North. In the 1990s, for example, the bicentennial of the Rising of '98 and the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the Famine received greater state sponsored, commercially sponsored, academically sponsored celebrations than the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Easter Rising (1991) or the sixtieth anniversary of the death of Yeats (1999).<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the 1965 Yeats Centenary and the 1966 commemorations of the Easter Rising prove to be watershed dates not only in historical and political "revisionism," but also in the development of that literary culture that has, for the latter decades of the twentieth-century distinguished Ireland—North and South. As Montague phrased it for *The Dolmen Miscellany*, it is a matter of "a general" (and generational) "change of sensibility"—a matter of a new, lively, world- and language-conscious generation coming to the fore.<sup>15</sup> Into public artistic life came a consciousness that in many ways had set aside first Yeats and Lady Gregory and the Literary Revival, and then de Valéra and the Rising.

Again, the editorial choices of Liam Miller and the publishing record of his Dolmen Press register this generational shift in sensibility in a surprising number of ways. Following Miller's scholarly interests and his growing engagement with American scholars and the

"Yeats industry," Dolmen became heavily invested in the Yeats Centenary and its echoing effects, as *The Dolmen Press Yeats Centenary Papers* (March, 1965–May, 1968) and the *New Yeats Papers* (October, 1971–May, 1975). A devotee of Yeats's and Clarke's poetic pocket theater, Miller was himself a student of Yeats's plays, as his *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats* (1977) attests. Likewise mandarin in character, Miller's Dolmen Editions of 1966—a fine press project that Miller pursued into the 1980s—announce that transformed sensibility. Miller pointedly timed the publication of the first three Dolmen Editions to coincide with the public events commemorating the Easter Rising. He published the first two Dolmen Editions—Thomas Kinsella's *Wormwood* and John Montague's *All Legendary Obstacle*—in March, 1966, and the third—Austin Clarke's *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust*—in May, 1966.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the long-awaited, triumphant publication of the Dolmen Edition Kinsella's *Tain* in November, 1969, followed on the outbreak of the "Troubles" in the North.

James Liddy's *Arena* came between Miller's publication of *nonplus* (1958–60), *Poetry Ireland* (1962–1968) and of *The Dolmen Miscellany* (1962) and his release of the *Yeats Papers* (1965).<sup>17</sup> In the late 1960s, copies of *Arena* could sometimes be found in Dublin at the Eblana Bookshop, or at Parson's Bookshop near the canal, or in the back room of Hodges Figgis on Dawson Street. The complete four-issue run of *Arena* was republished under the title *This Was Arena* in 1982 with a spirited, anecdotal introduction by Liddy beginning, "I have always wanted to exchange new magazines for old, for I know that magazines can alter the shape of a literary landscape."<sup>18</sup> The book-lover's details concerning *Arena* are uncomplicated. The four issues were designed by Liam Miller, whom Liddy identified in the third issue as the "Onlie begetter of us and much else." Printed at the redoubtable *Leinster Leader* works in Naas, each issue measures 37 x 25 cms., the standard demi-folio and the same format as the unlucky *Kavanagh's Weekly* (April–July, 1952).<sup>19</sup> Issues ran to twenty or twenty-four pages, the last issue being forty-four pages in length. The austere design of *Kavanagh's Weekly* ran counter to the incitements of its contents. In contrast, *Arena* offered a cover page carrying art work in one color or a photograph that reflected not only the design interests of Liam Miller and Liam O'Connor, but also *Arena's* intention to take the visual arts seriously.

From the start, Patrick Kavanagh (1905–1967) served as an icon of the titular spirit of *Arena* and its Bohemian enterprise, as Liddy acknowledged in 1982: "Of course we led off with Paddy Kavanagh, 'Our Dryden and our perfect man'" (*TWA* 5). Poems by Kavanagh appear in each issue of *Arena*.<sup>20</sup> Printed in black over yellow, Kavanagh's caricature—the owlsh poet standing in Upper Leeson Street—dominates the front page of the magazine's first issue (see figure below). Likewise, five confessional "pieces" by Kavanagh start off the issue. Interestingly, these confront the effects of Kavanagh's own Bohemian nature, not to say his Bohemian coterie, summed up in his discovery of the poetry of "not caring" in the famous Canal Bank sonnets in *Recent Poems* (1958) and *Come Dance with Kitty Stobling* (1960).<sup>21</sup> That recuperative casting-off of worldly striving—of mandarin excellence—was the exemplary clearing-away that the editors of *Arena* sought.<sup>22</sup> The first issue's opening epigraph proposes this. The editor's quote from Robert Lowell's 1961 "imitation" of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Die Tauben": "Still only by suffering the rat-race in the arena / can the heart learn to beat." Liddy's opening manifesto for the issue poses *Arena* as "an organ of expression and those aware of art," meaning those whose hearts have learned to "beat."



Liddy's editorial cites the coming generation of, mainly, Dolmen poets—Kinsella, Montague, Pearse—before claiming rather too hopefully that “in Patrick Kavanagh we possess a truly creative critic of society and letters whose virtuosity is impaired.” Liddy has in mind not just the contrarian stance of *Kavanagh's Weekly*, but also the example Kavanagh set when, as he says in “About Reason, Maybe,” “The day I walked out on Reason—that old Plodder / (But you didn't) / Was the best day of my life....” (TWA 8). But parenthetically, the nay-saying voice in Kavanagh counters this Bohemian, Romantic stance, knowing that the poetic of “not caring” leads to an impasse, as Kavanagh complains in “In Blinking Blankness: Three Efforts” (TWA 8). Indeed, *Arena* closed in 1965 with a reworking of “Epic,” one of the Canal Bank sonnets, in “Personal Problem.” It is a telling confession from Kavanagh: “What am I to do / With the void growing more awful every hour / I lacked a classical discipline . . .” (TWA 114). Rather than the exemplar of Kavanagh as confessional self-critic, it is the exemplar of Kavanagh as an embodiment of a spiritual stance—the Beat poetic of “not caring”—that cast a spell over *Arena's* four issues.

The first issue of *Arena* is both a manifesto and a broadside. Opened flat out from the center, this inaugural issue of *Arena* offers what amounts to a folio broadside of poems from the generation of poets following Kinsella, Montague, and Murphy: Macdara Woods, Michael Harnett [Hartnett] (1941–1998) Derek Mahon, Christy Brown (1932–1981) and Michael Smith. Of these, Hartnett is the most revered in Ireland, and especially for his leading accomplishments in English and Irish, and Mahon is best known internationally. Mahon's early poem “Lovers Wake to Differences” observes: “All this late lying from expended power / Destroys the vital impulse to be There, / Awake to things, where and when things occur—” (TWA 17). With Eiléán Ní Chuilleanáin, Macdara Woods founded the poetry magazine *Cyphers* in 1975. Michael Smith, likewise, founded *The Lace Curtain* (1969–1969), which continued *Arena's* interests, and New Writers Press. The same issue contains poems from Leland Bardwell, Austin Clarke, Lorna Reynolds, and Richard Weber, as well as fiction by Mary Lavin and John Jordan.

Five broad essays on art and Irish life by Paul Potts, Patrick Hall, Michael Kane, Liam O'Connor, Frederick May (1911–1985), and James Liddy make up *Arena's* manifesto. All focus closely on the importance of the arts to 1960s Ireland. Starting with Nicolas Berdyaev's notion of the “bankruptcy of humanism,” Michael Kane argues that the arts are essentially a spiritual pursuit, not an intellectual one. Observing that the mandarin official culture of Ireland has promoted this “central error,” Kane concludes that “The value of a true artist . . . is in his contemplative vision” (TWA 15). “Towards Painting,” by Liam O'Connor, takes this leaning toward mysticism an abstract step further in asserting the primacy of the “ultimate point” or radiating as a “centre . . . [that] cannot be duplicated or multiplied—it is something absolute and illimitable” (TWA 19). And here the expected allusions to Christianity—painting “is the monstern radiating the idea of Christ”—meet allusions to Buddhism—painting “is OM”—and O'Connor closes with what now seem to be “New Age” aphorisms. Like Kane, Liddy begins with a borrowed notion—this time from Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). Unlike O'Connor, Liddy starts off with aphorism—“The lonely boy of the poor has angels to talk to”—and then reflects on them. Liddy's twenty-one contemplations on becoming a poet are followed by a “rosary of statements for my neighbour” (TWA 26). Like O'Connor, Liddy grounds his contemplations in a democratized, yet old-fashioned catholicity: “The

HALF-A-CROWN

## ARENA

EDITORS JAMES LIDDY LIAM O'CONNOR

"Back in the dovecote, there's another bird,  
by all odds the most beautiful,  
one that never flew out, and can know nothing of gentleness . . .  
Still, only by suffering the rat-race in the arena  
can the heart learn to beat".

From Rilke's *DIE TAUBEN*, adapted by Robert Lowell

ARENA is conceived as an organ of expression for artists and those aware of art. Certain things must be said about the situation in this country. It is an exaggeration to say, as a distinguished critic did at Noel Sheridan's exhibition, that "we have now about twenty painters who are up to Parisian standards". There are good Irish painters: Louis le Brocquy, Patrick Scott, Daniel O'Neill, Gerard Dillon, Leslie McWeeney, Patrick Pye, and, of course, the contributors to this journal. How good they are is a question yet to be answered.

As regards writing, the facts have become clear. Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh are major poets. In second place are three developing youngish poets, Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, and Pearse Hutchinson. Then some younger poets queuing up for the odd vacant place the Muses offer. James Plunkett and John McGahern could write the novels of the future. The short story has a number of young writers beginning to make their reputation. John Jordan seems the best critic in this island. And in Patrick Kavanagh we possess a truly creative critic of society and letters whose virtuosity is unimpaired.

Epiphenomenal information! Those who know know, as once those who had ears heard. Life initiates art. Life? Most of what pretends to be life has pretty little to do with what life is. Such a statement must bring the demand for an explanation of what it is . . . to which the only possible reply is . . . laughter which fraternises inwardly with tragedy.

Success? Success occurs only in the darkness of being alone. Darkness in which a particular soul observes a flicker of life and makes its love statement. This affirmation, despite its subtle structure, must be as natural as a smile coaxed from the lips of a child.

We only ask: What is real?

Feelings are real. Image-echoes from within which those baptized by art bring forth. Strings on the guitar of love.

## NUMBER ONE

SPRING 1963

Page 1: Five Pieces by Patrick Kavanagh. 3: Paul Potts, Art and Society. 4: Two Poems by Austin Clarke. Patrick Hall, Notes on Painting. Richard Weber, Mother and Child. 5: Mary Lavin, Brigid. 7: Berthold Brecht, Sons of Exile translated from the German by Hedi Anderson. Richard Weber, Poems from Love and Landscape adapted from the Japanese. Michael Kane, An Essay. 9: Liam O'Connor, Gallery. 10: Five Young Poets, Macdara Woods, Michael Harnett, Derek Mahon, Christy Brown and Michael Smith. 12: Two Poems by Lorna Reynolds. 13: Liam O'Connor, Towards Painting. 15: Stephen Ranehen, Elegiac Note on R.C. James Liddy, Four Poems. 16: Frederick May, On Being a Composer. 17: Leland Bardwell: Two Poems. John Jordan, September 1939. 18: James Liddy, I, the Poet. 20: Notes on Contributors.

## Five Pieces by Patrick Kavanagh

THE SAME AGAIN

I have my friends, my public and they are waiting  
For me to come again as their one and only bard  
With a new statement that will repay all the waitment  
While I was hitting the bottle hard.  
I know it is not right to be light and flippant  
There are people in the streets who steer by my star.  
There was nothing they could do but view me while I threw  
Back large whiskeys in the corner of a smoky bar  
And if only I would get drunk it wouldn't be so bad  
With a pain in my stomach I wasn't even comic  
Swallowing every digestive pill to be had.  
Some of my friends stayed faithful but quite a handful  
Looked upon it was the end: I could quite safely be  
Dismissed a dead loss in the final up toss.  
He's finished and that's definitely.

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*Arena*, 1 (Spring, 1963), 20 pp. Both Doyle's caricature and the titles are printed in black over brushwork in eye-catching yellow. The editors cited are James Liddy and Liam O'Connor.

soul recognising that suffering is not a weed but a flower" (TWA 25). In *Arena's* manifesto may be noted an anxious, anticipatory reaction against the imminent secularizing materialism that came to mark the 1960s in Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, *Arena's* Bohemian manifesto constitutes a reaction against the swell of Revival pieties, to be celebrated in the Yeats centenary in 1965, and those of Fianna Fáil nationalism, to be celebrated during the anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966.

In *Arena's* second issue, released in fall 1963, the editors develop the manifestos of the first issue. Commenting in the editorial that *Arena* is "assured of its purpose and feeling certain of its reception," Liddy sees the magazine's refusal to print "journalists or critics of any kind, including the academic," as an advantage for those who "know beauty without humanity is unacceptable" (TWA 27). Liddy cites Pasternak, Yevtushenko, and James Baldwin and takes a stand against "racialism" and "mass-thought" in a manner that underscores the Bohemian affiliations of the enterprise. To that end, the magazine's title is printed over red and half of June Keating's sketches of children at play given in red. The red flag for the whole issue, however, is "The Siege of Mullingar," Montague's poem depicting the 1963 national festival of traditional music, or *fleadh cheoil*, in Mullingar has come to epitomize the cultural and moral sea-change of 1960s Ireland. The poem's oft-quoted refrain tells the tale:

In the early morning the lovers  
Lay on both sides of the canal  
Listening on Sony transistors  
To the agony of Pope John.  
Yet it didn't seem strange or blasphemous,  
This ground bass of death and  
Resurrection, as we strolled along:  
*Puritan Ireland's dead and gone,*  
*A myth of O'Connor and O'Faolain.* (TWA 27)

Mindful that, for example, the Patrician Congress had preoccupied Dublin only two years earlier in June 1961, the authors of *Arena's* manifestos register some disquiet at the pace of cultural change in Ireland, all the while helping it along. As it had in *Arena's* first issue, that registration comes in the emphasis that J. P. Hackett, Paul Potts, and the painter Patrick Pye place on the spiritual—an emphasis sometimes worded in Christian terms, but many times not. The *pensées* of the Finnish painter Otto Mäkilä provide one example: "There is nothing you can believe if you do not feel it is natural" (TWA 47). Patrick Pye's extensive essay "The Artist as Servant" is more explicit:

Art is what Governments send around in exhibitions to other countries to prove they are cultivated. Now, certainly the ancients did not think like that. ... Right enough, they believed in a spirit world as well as a material world .... They saw the spirit world and the material world as both being objective ... It was this holy naivety which allowed the ancients to find their identity with the world. (TWA 45)



## HALF-A-CROWN

# ARENA

EDITORS MICHAEL HARNETT JAMES LIDDY LIAM O'CONNOR

NUMBER 2

AUTUMN 1963

Page 1: John Montague, *The Siege of Mullingar*; Anthony Kerrigan, *Watching the Girls Go By*. 2: Thomas MacIntyre, *Hosanna*. 3: Austin Clarke, *Cypress Grove*. 4: J. P. Hackett, *Aristocracy in Life and Letters*. 5: James Liddy, *Notes towards a James Joyce Mythology*. 6: Eoin Burke, *Two Poems*. 7: Patrick Kavanagh, *The Poet's Ready Reckoner*. 8: Louis MacNeice, 1907-1963; J. P. Hackett, *Two Poems*. 9: Michael Harnett, *Tao*. 17: Five Poets, James J. MacAulley, *Madhara Woods*, Paul Durcan, Michael Smith, Jocelyn Carter. 19: Patrick Pys, *The Artist as Servant*. 20: Anthony Kerrigan, *Mary Jordan*; Leland Bardwell, *Three Poems*. 21: Otto Makila, *Thoughts*. 22: Paul Potts, *Portrait of a Soldier and of those for whom he fought*. 23: Documents for Paul Potts; James Liddy, *Three Poems*. 24: Notes on Contributors.

"Back in the dovecoat, there's another bird,  
by all odds the most beautiful,  
one that never flew out, and can know nothing of gentleness . . .  
Still, only by suffering the rat-race in the arena  
can the heart learn to beat."  
From Rilke's *DIE TAUBEN*, adapted by Robert Lowell

"And yet, everywhere I go in the world,  
I am still receiving the same signal: that  
the war is not between west and east or  
black and white, but against the plate  
glass."

R. J. WATHEN, Crete 1962.

ARENA goes into a second issue assured of its purpose and feeling certain of its reception.

It has been noted that ARENA is not interested in the standards conventionally applied to the arts in Ireland and that it does not publish journalists or critics of any kind, including the academic. It seems to us that standards will emerge in time from the work being done in Ireland now. If what we publish represents only certain painters and writers and their peoples, what we offer is for everyone. Especially for everyone!

The editors do not regard themselves as ivory tower tenants or lily-holders, but a group who know beauty without humanity is not acceptable. Asked for a dogma, we would say we believe in the coming of the bards: who deny Narcissus, who synthesise the mass-thought, and who utter in public what should be said. Pasternak was a bard and Yevtushenko, if he is any good, will be another.

James Baldwin is a similar figure in America because he has become the bard of those who hold that racists think at a sub-human level and apologise for Hitler. The colour bar is the principal ghetto of our society. That is why we print Paul Potts's essay on the Jews. We append to his statement our own opinion of racialism as a token contribution to the push towards a breakthrough to love.

## Watching the Girls Go By: Until Vedova Strikes the Time

Some symmetry about a buttocks hurrying past imposes, takes precedence over an Ave Maria: but the corner turned, it holds little tyranny:

Vedova, now, won't hurry past:  
the smoke lingers, spirals over the scene of the blast:  
"The damned bomb," explains the expert from the demolition squad, "won't stop going off"

to clockworks," says the Chief.  
"There's something of a clock about it . . . and we could disassemble it, if we knew its hour of Luck . . . Though frankly, despite the chimes, I can't tell the time . . . Perhaps we'd better just let it tick."

ANTHONY KERRIGAN

"Watching the Girls Go By . . ." first appeared in *Papeles de San Armadanos* (Madrid-Palma de Mallorca), Nov.-Dec. 1962; it was translated into Spanish by Camilo José Cela, of the Spanish Academy. Emilio Vedova, the painter, a Venice Biennale award-winner, former partigiano, was one of the leading Communists in Italy; he is now one of its leading anti-Communists.

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## The Siege of Mullingar

At the Fleadh Cheoil in Mullingar  
There were two sounds, the breaking  
Of glass, and the background pulse  
Of music. Young girls roamed  
The streets with eager faces,  
Pushing for men. Bottles in  
Hand, they rowed out a song:  
*Puritan Ireland's dead and gone,  
A myth of O'Connor and O'Faolain.*

In the early morning the lovers  
Lay on both sides of the canal  
Listening on Sony transistors  
To the agony of Pope John.  
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Resurrection, as we strolled along:  
*Puritan Ireland's dead and gone,  
A myth of O'Connor and O'Faolain.*

Further on, breasting the wind  
Waves of the deserted harbour  
We saw a pair, a cob and his pen,  
Most nobly linked. Everything then  
In our casual morning vision  
Seemed to flow in one direction,  
Line simple as a song:  
*Puritan Ireland's dead and gone,  
A myth of O'Connor and O'Faolain.*

JOHN MONTAGUE

Ours is essentially a tragic age; so we refuse  
to take it tragically. The cataclysm has  
happened, we are among the ruins, we start  
to build up new little habitats, to have new  
little hopes.

D. H. LAWRENCE:  
*Lady Chatterley's Lover*

DRAWINGS BY JUNE KEATING

*Arena*, 2 (Autumn, 1963), 24 pp. June Keating's drawings are printed in red and grey while the title is printed in black over brushwork in red. The top and bottom epigraphs appear in red. The editors cited are Michael Har[t]nett, James Liddy, and Liam O'Connor.

Liddy's "Notes towards a James Joyce Mythology" establishes that disquiet: "Joyce knew the whiteman was wrecked, and by himself on a raft," recalling Géricault's *The Wreck of the Medusa*. Then Liddy elaborates: "The raft he called his soul . . .," and "The voyage: he was alone. Until he invented Leopold Bloom . . ." (TWA 31). For Liddy, Joyce the word-smith is one of Pye's "ancients" to whom Liddy vows that "By the word 'Bloom' I give allegiance to Christ human" (TWA 32).

In the most considerable poem of *Arena's* second issue after Montague's "The Siege of Mullingar," Michael Hartnett answers best the burgeoning disquiet of the early 1960s.<sup>24</sup> Set out in eighty-one numbered verse aphorisms, "Tao" is dedicated to Hartnett's "*father who is a Taoist / James Liddy who tries to be a Taoist / and John Jordan who should be a Taoist*" (TWA 42).<sup>25</sup> A thoroughly "beat" gesture in Liddy's terms—as well as Beat in American terms—Hartnett declares:

I wish for this land  
not the words of love  
but its actions;  
love in action  
is the white road  
between the yew trees  
the exuberance of a girl.  
leaping from rock to rock. (TWA 42)

Hartnett also contributed to "Documents for Paul Potts," as did Macdara Woods and James Liddy, with "Song for James Baldwin." These "documents" take up the conscience of neutral Ireland by considering what Hartnett calls "racialism"—"the last blackness of the heart" (TWA 4). Woods sees the question of racism as a symptom of "world lost in spirit, dying in soul." Liddy echoes Martin Luther King: "I too have a dream"; quotes Allen Ginsberg; and alludes to the atrocities of World War II—to the camps of Central Europe, to Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.<sup>26</sup> Ireland's intense interest in the unfolding moral drama of the Civil Rights movement in the United States—a drama made immediately available by the advent of television service North and South—contributed much to, for example, the formation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in 1967. All three writers respond to a brief memoir by Paul Potts (1911–1990) ruminating on his service in Israel's 1948 War of Independence and on twentieth-century anti-Semitism.<sup>27</sup>

The editors of *Arena's* third number (Summer, 1964)—now including Michael Hartnett—respond immediately to adverse reactions to their manifold stance against "racialism" in the second number. First, after the repeated Rilke epigraph comes one selected from Albert Camus: "The artist alone can ensure that a renaissance will cherish justice and liberty" (TWA 51). Then the editorial poses three points, the last of them being poetic. The first two restate forcefully the editors' moral and spiritual stances against religious complacency, nationalism, and racialism. Tellingly, those statements fall between the 1961 Patrician Congress and the 1965 Yeats Centenary and the April 1966 commemoration of the Easter Rising. The second ends with a quotation from Simone Weil (1909–1943): "Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is a purification." The first point registers the sting of conventional disapproval,

THREE-AND-SIX

## ARENA



EDITORS MICHAEL HARNETT

JAMES LIDDY

LIAM O'CONNOR

## Number 3 Summer 1964

"Back in the dovecote, there's another bird,  
by all odds the most beautiful,  
one that never flew out, and can know nothing of gentleness....  
Still, only by suffering the rat-race in the arena  
can the heart learn to beat."

—From Rilke's *DIE TAUBEN*, adapted by Robert Lowell

"In our work we cannot avoid taking risks and being bitterly attacked. We must take the risks—the passive artist is an anachronism—but we must not become embittered ourselves.... The artist alone can ensure that a renaissance will cherish justice and liberty. Without him it will be shapeless and if it ever manages to begin will never reach its end."  
—Albert Camus

Page 1: Thomas Kinsella, *Three Poems*. 2: John Montague, *The Road Ahead*. 3: J. Puig i Ferriter, *Johnny Imitating His Author*. 4: James Corbett, *Translations from Jiminez*; Pearse Hutchinson, *Two Poems*. 5: Patrick Kavanagh, *A Summer Morning Walk*; James Liddy, *Ta Se Imithe*. 6: Michael Kane, *The Hoax called "Internationalism"*. 7: Paul Durcan, *L. W. Michaelson, Knute Skinner, Penelope Shuttle, Howard McCord, Richard Weber*. 8: Paul Potts, *A Rainbow For Their Tears*. 9: Anthony Cronin, *Two Poems*; Leland Bardwell, *Seven Poems*. 10: James Liddy. 11: Tracy Thompson, *John Dillon, Christy Brown, Geoffrey Hazard*. 12: Michael Harnett, *Golgotha, Gentlemen, Please*. 13: Liam Miller, *Michael Biggs, Letter-cutter*. 14: Liam O'Connor, *Thoughts on Painting*; James Liddy, *Poems*. 15: Patrick McGowan, *A Grain of Sand*. 16: Michael Harnett, *The Persian Sequence*. 17: Paul Potts, *Seven Notes For A Poem*; *Notes on Contributors*.

ARENA's treasury is low but its house is in order and it is clear about a number of things:

1. Racism, that is treating one's neighbour according to colour or race, is commonplace. Sophisticated racism, the kind

adopted by two critics of ARENA 2, evades the issue by numbering it among current dilemmas that can only be understood in relation to history, and resolved by time. We insist: racism is the test of Christianity and of whiteman's love.

2. People become saintly when their involvement with a situation acquires intensity so as to form a purification. But the "conscience" of many religious people never touches themselves: the saving of one's soul to the exclusion of care about other souls, and the observation of conventions not founded on personal decision. An example: debates on television about such questions of "conscience" as the parking of cars outside churches. Believers should consider Simone Weil's "hard" saying: "Religion in so far as it is a source of consolation is a hindrance to true faith: in this sense atheism is a purification."

3. Note to the young poets. Allusions of any kind are fatal because they have been done before and have become a style. Use of another poet's method is influence. Wait. A year, or two or three mean nothing when you are under thirty. Your real enemy now is enthusiasm. Trust nothing you write.

## Three Poems by Thomas Kinsella

## ON A GIFT IN THE SHAPE OF A HEART

Open this and you will see  
A waste, a nearly naked tree  
That will not rest till it is bare.  
It shivers, shivers in the air  
Scraping at its yellow leaves  
And suffers — when the tempest heaves —  
In fierce relief, the Heaven-sent  
Convulsions of self-punishment.

What cannot rest till it is bare,  
Though branches crack and fibres tear?

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*Arena*, 3 (Summer, 1964), 20 pp. The title is printed over brushwork in sea green. The uncredited photograph shows (left to right): Michael Har[t]nett, James Liddy, and Liam O'Connor.



yet takes its Bohemian stand forthrightly:

Sophisticated racialism, the kind adopted by two critics of *Arena* 2, evades the issue by numbering it among the current dilemmas that can only be understood in relation to history, and resolved by time. We insist: racialism is the test of Christianity and of whiteman's love." (*TWA* 51)

Moreover, the cover page of this issue of *Arena* personalizes the magazine's editorial stance by showing the editors—Michael Hartnett, James Liddy, Liam O'Connor—standing in one of Dublin's shopping streets. The photograph runs directly under the title, this time printed on sea green.

Prose dominates this issue: four short stories—by John Montague, J. Puig i Ferrer, Michael Hartnett, and Patrick McGowan—and four essays—by Michael Kane, Paul Potts, James Liddy, Liam Miller, and Liam O'Connor. The most substantial of these is Kane's "The Hoax they Call Internationalism," written as a lecture for the Kilkenny Arts Society. Like Yeats before him, and like Kavanagh, Kane takes to task the provinciality of Ireland's capacity to be pixillated by "the flashy totems of International styles" at the expense of the "authentic flash of poetry, of the spirit" (*TWA* 56). As in previous issues of *Arena*, the distress here is at the propensity for the bad coin of inauthenticity—whether imported or no—to drive out the authenticity of the solo artist. And Kane defines that artist thus: "As long as there is one man somewhere concerned enough about the mysterious, painful beauty of life on earth, of life in the universe, that he wants to put a form to it . . ." (*TWA* 56). Liam Miller, *Arena's* typographer, provides one example of artistic integrity in "Michael Biggs, Lettercutter."<sup>28</sup> Along with René Hague, the Dubliner Michael Biggs (1928–1993) brought to Ireland from Ditchling Eric Gill's generous, authentically Catholic print aesthetic. Miller praises Biggs in spiritual terms for the authority and humility of his work, for the "dictates of the artist's mind are executed by his manual labor without hindrance" (*TWA* 65). Indeed, Miller casts Biggs as one of the "saintly" proposed in *Arena's* summer 1964 editorial: "People become saintly when their involvement with a situation acquires intensity so as to form a purification" (*TWA* 51).

*Arena* sounds the note of liberation ever more explicitly with each succeeding issue, as in the case of Liam O'Connor's "Thoughts on Painting," which concludes: "In art is expressed the struggle of the spirit, the conflict of the inner man in his urge towards light, beauty, freedom" (*TWA* 66). At first, *Arena's* writers articulate their engagement with Irish culture in the early 1960s either in terms of abstract aesthetic claims for the importance of art in any culture or by way of citing native literary models provided by Joyce—in Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom—and by Patrick Kavanagh. Sounded clearly in *Arena's* second issue, the liberatory note in the third becomes, in effect, a chord amplified by having been contested. Constituting that chord are the writers' various protests against manifold forms of "racialism" revealed by World War II—and Ireland's neutrality then—as well as the Civil Rights movement in the United States. The three parts of James Liddy's "Three Voices of America"—of tourism, of Paul Robeson, and of the recently assassinated John F. Kennedy—are pointedly dedicated: "*To All Workers for Civil Rights, The Decent Americans*" (*TWA* 66). For example, communal prejudice entailed in Irish superstition constitutes the central object of moral judgment in John Montague's story "The Road Ahead."<sup>29</sup>



Likewise, Anthony Cronin's poem "The Persuaders" unreels in rhymed quatrains the forces of social convention arrayed against the individual: "And much that's not bad is partly what we grew to / through seeing ourselves in someone else's eyes . . ." (TWA 60).

Of course, Irish social conventions continued to enforce late Victorian public morality against which Bohemian Dublin strained, as dramatized in John Dillon's poem "The Sins of the People" (TWA 63). Consequently, an increasingly audible note in *Arena* is that of sexual liberation as sounded forthrightly in Montague's "The Siege of Mullingar" or, cloaked by orientalia, in Michael Hartnett's "The Persian Sequence" (TWA 69). In a prose triptych titled "On Leeson Street and Harry Street 1994," Liddy proclaims two discoveries: "(I) God has died because murdered in the name of morality (II) Love is free without form-signing, and givable without assigning cause and refused by the gracious" (TWA 62). Liddy answers those brave declarations in the uncollected poem "Tá Sé Imithe" (TWA 55), which cloaks sexuality in the national allegory of political exile.

Yet, as with the disquiet sounded earlier about abandoning public cultural orthodoxies in increasing favor of consumerist secularism, *Arena's* contributors—particularly the poets—register a similar anxiety about sexual experience and romantic idealism uncoupled from prewar moral orthodoxy. Thomas Kinsella's three opening poems—"On a Gift in the Shape of a Heart," "Forsaken," and especially "Mask of Love"—come close to the confessional mode of Lowell or Plath when they frame the romantic engagement of male and female in absolute existential terms:

Mask of Love, staring  
Aghast out of unreason,  
Do you come to use for peace?  
Me, flinching from your stare?  
Her, whose face you bear? (TWA 52)

The American Beat note sounds in Howard McCord's bluesy and masculinist "Girl Song": "there's no curfew / On my legs, / *Shining Billy*" (TWA 58).<sup>30</sup> More conventional is the yearning of Christy Brown's well-wrought lyric "Surf" set in the Joycean setting of Howth, which glimpses "a girl in a red loose coat / and a thin-haired man with sloping shoulders. / He was kissing her throat," and closes: "Long afterwards in all that steaming waste / I stared at the flattened sand where they had lain" (TWA 63).<sup>31</sup> Notably, this issue contains sardonic lyrics on sexual dependency by Leland Bardwell, whose work—like Kavanagh's—appears in each issue of *Arena*.<sup>32</sup> In these seven songs, Bardwell adopts a jaded, Brechtian persona, as in: "A Prayer for All Young Girls":

Dear God, make me rich, taxi-minded, expeditious  
Make me please, dear God,  
A thorough-going sex-ridden bitch. Amen. (TWA 61)

While Patrick Kavanagh's "Personal Problem" closes *Arena's* last number, eight poems by Leland Bardwell open it under a photograph of her taken by Liam Miller. Published in the midst of the Yeats Centenary, this double issue's manifestos, stories, and poetry provide a counter-statement both to the official national discourse about Yeats and the Re-

vival and to the hieratic discourse of the academic Yeats “industry.” Liddy notes this at the end of his “offering” for Yeats: “A centenary is an excuse for those revisionists who hate art (academics, journalists, publishers, failed poets, women out of love) to make themselves important.” Anthony Cronin and James Liddy make “Two Offerings for W. B. Yeats.” Presumably Liddy excepted Liam Miller’s good works. Liddy treats Yeats as, in American terms, an original “phony,” who “translated artificiality into sincerity” according to “an aesthetic apart from Aristotle and the Christian Church.” Cronin registers some disquiet at this Beat beatification of Yeats—and, presumably, at the presumptions of the centenary itself—and yet grants Yeats a passion that “comes from the courage and intensity with which he contemplated certain ultimate facts. But Yeats’s rectitude certainly differs from that of Kavanagh, or of Bardwell, in Cronin’s view:

Finally, though Yeats may have been wrong in the importance he attached to art, poetry, “beautiful lofty things,” useless in the eyes of most, and in the scorn he poured on those who did not care for them, it is impossible for poets not to feel that he was right. (*TWA* 113)

For this last issue, *Arena*’s title is printed over blue, Yeats’s heraldic color, the color of the Irish Blueshirts in the 1930s, and one of the moody colors of the American Beats. This time the editors acknowledge an “official” subvention from An Chomhairle Ealaíon (the Arts Council of Ireland), private family financing proving inadequate. Sixteen years later, Liddy acknowledged that he owed *Arena* “to a trinity: first, my dear mother a one-woman Arts council,” and then Liam Miller “who advised wonderfully,” and last Anthony Kerrigan, “who was the middleman for so many of these pieces” (*TWA* 5).<sup>33</sup> Liddy’s cheerful introduction to the 1981 reprint of *Arena* contrasts with the more pugnacious stance of his 1965 editorial: “ARENA about to die salutes you with a double issue . . .” and: “We done our best when we were let.” (*TWA* 71) Liddy’s country idiom registers clearly the sense of opposition that *Arena* met—opposition that the Bohemian spirit or the Beat mood proudly acknowledges as a sign of doing the right thing. The double issue of forty-four pages reiterates the signature themes of the first three issues, but with a more European cast. *Arena* is proud to publish Edward Dahlberg; Robert Graves, “last of the Anglo-Irish poets”; Eugenio Montale translated by Desmond O’Grady; Miguel de Unamuno, translated by Kerrigan; and Leland Bardwell, described as a good writer unknown in her own country. Liddy’s editorial sides with the Independent Artists group, founded in 1960.<sup>34</sup> Quoting Yeats in one of his gnomic moods, Liddy strikes the spiritual note: “‘What then?’, sings Yeats’s ghost.” The editorial construes the contrariness of the *Arena* project as a threefold assertion of the individuality of the painter or writer, of the primacy of the artist, and of the spiritual necessity of art.

In this issue, the prose carries the ideational burden of the *Arena* project, beginning with excerpts from Edward Dahlberg’s meditations “outsider” from *Reasons of the Heart*.<sup>35</sup> The chief essays of the issue—Anthony Kerrigan’s translation of Unamuno’s two contemplations of Cervantes’ Don Quixote, Austin Clarke’s “Poet as Saint,” and Michael Kane’s “Journals of a Painter”—weave together *Arena*’s trinity of themes. Clarke’s paragraphs gently mock the religious obsessions of Philip Francis Little (1866–1926)—a Rathmines character in a black sombrero and sackcloth apron—all the while respecting his “learned,



## FIVE SHILLINGS

# ARENA

EDITORS MICHAEL HARNETT JAMES LIDDY LIAM O'CONNOR

Number 4

Spring 1965

"Back in dovecot, there's another bird,  
by all odds the most beautiful,  
one that never flew out, and can know nothing of gentleness . . .  
Still, only by suffering the rat-race in the arena  
can the heart learn to beat".

From Rilke's *Die Tauben*, adapted by Robert Lowell

Page 1: Robert Graves, *Dynamite Barbee*. Eight Poems by Leland Bardwell.  
3: Edward Dahlberg *from Reasons of the Heart*. 4: Miguel de Unamuno, *Don Quixote's Beatitude*. 5: Lasse Söderberg, *Little Casalan Landscape*. Pearse Hutchinson, *Spanish Folk-Songs*. 6: James Plunkett, *Work in Progress*. 9: Anthony Cronin, *Three Poems*. Michael Kane, *The Journals of a Painter*. 12: Howard McCord, *Talk*. 13: John Montague, *Country Matters*. Grover Amen, *Metaphysical Link*. Irving Feldman, *Poem*. 14: Eugenio Montale, *Ten Poems*. 16: L. W. Michaelson, *Dissertation*. Brian Higgins, *Five Poems*. 17: Austin Clarke, *Poet as Saint*. 18: Tom MacIntyre, *Such a Favour*. 21: James J. McAuley, *Allegorical Conversation—I*. Brian Lynch, *A Death*. 22: Brian Higgins, *The English Question*. 23: Geoffrey Hazard, *Song*. Anthony Kerrigan, *Incantation of a Holy Tremor*. 24: Liam O'Connor, *Representation*. 25: Paul Potts, *Ireland, too, has her Colonies, or at least her Colonials*. 26: Richard Weber, *The Seasons of Your Eyes*. Gamel Woolsey, *All Souls*. James Kelly, *West of Ireland*. 27: Howard McCord, *The Great Toad Hunt*. 28: C. H. Simson, *Loquiter Senex*. 29: J D Read, *A Letter*. M Diox, *Unholy Pictures*. B Lynch, *Mandarin*. 31: P McCowan, *The Hour of Death*. G Dowden, *Soor with Citizens*. J. D. Reed, *Epitaphs*. T McGuigle, *Short Thought on Death*. Knute Skinner, *The Skin*. 32: J Horgan, *Next Time, Perhaps*. 33: Miguel Hernandez, *Lullabies of the Onion*. 34: Michael Harnett, *Thirteen Poems Written in Madrid*. 36: Michael Smyth, *A Medieval Romance*. 37: Lorna Reynolds, *Diary of Spring*. 38: Dom-pick Browne, Annette. Desmond Fennell, *Dublin Attitudes to Painting — A Critique*. 40: Hilary Masters, *Two Poems*. 41: James Liddy, *six Poems*. 42: Two Offerings for W. B. Yeats. 43: Sidney Bernard Smith, *On First Looking into the Burrow*. 44: Patrick Kavanagh, *Personal Problem*. Notes on contributors.

## Robert Graves

### DYNAMITE BARBEE

Dynamite Barbee, no clo'es on,  
Rode on a lion whose name was John—  
Dynamite Barbee, no! man, no!  
She'll make trouble wherever she go.  
"Short life only and a long time dead,  
Got to be practical", Barbee said.

Judged old lion was nigh to death,  
Changed to a jackal, corpse on his breath—  
Stink of corpse on her hands and hair,  
Dynamite Barbee, she not care:  
"Short life only and long time dead,  
Got to be practical", Barbee said.

Dynamite Barbee never got rich—  
Things she done for that son of a bitch!  
Pawned her ear-rings, pawned her fur,  
And big gold watch that Lion gave her:  
"Short life only and a long time dead,  
Got to be practical", Barbee said.

Sunk to the bottom, we guessed she would:  
Three times down and she's gone for good.  
Dynamite Barbee, no! man, no!  
That mean jackal never let her go—  
"Short life only and a long time dead,  
Got to be practical", Barbee said.

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ARENA about to die salutes you with a double issue in which we are proud to publish many foreign writers: particularly Edward Dahlberg, Robert Graves, last of the Anglo-Irish poets, Montale and the spirit of Unamuno. Proud too of being friends with good writers such as Leland Bardwell, unknown in their country. Our articles on painting reflect our support for the Independent Artists as well as the individual painter.

We done our best when we were let. We were young, we were payers, we were bad proof-readers, we were (sometimes) merry, we were very, very wise. The door of the nearest pub stayed open all day and we drank like prodigal sons. Now we think Spain would be a cheaper drinking life.

"What then?", sings Yeats's ghost. Nothing, except one goes on into the ratsalley struggle with one's psyche until the possibly blind end. Those who survive will communicate.



Photo: Liam Miller

## Eight Poems by Leland Bardwell

### STAR

Twinkle twinkle mad star of the poets  
That mocks the shivering critics  
Jostling for places at Cowards Gate;  
The guttering candle flame has claimed  
The quantities of their tongue.

And the young tree will stand dead in the dark  
Its bark and nervous system hacked  
By the fangs of the mordant ferret.

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erratic discourse,” praising the singularity of his vision, and esteeming his out-of-place individuality” (*TWA* 87). Miguel de Unamuno likewise treats Don Quixote as a secular saint in “Don Quixote’s Beatitude” and “Saint Quixote of La Manca.” The first recounts Don Quixote’s death and communion with Christ: “The tears of the madman of Spain mingled with the tears of Him who had been considered a madman by his own family (Mark 3:21)” (*TWA* 74). Unamuno argues for the beatification of Cervantes as a created embodiment of the “Quixotic Church” of Spain, like the Christ created by the Gospels. Unamuno’s Saint Quixote embodies “private sense and private sense” unlike the “idiots . . . who possess only commonsense” and “are in the majority” (*TWA* 75).<sup>37</sup> Quoting from Nietzsche—usually misspelled in *Arena*--and Erich Heller (1911-1990), Michael Kane takes up the problematic friction between nationality and individuality. In Ireland of the early 1960s, he sees the comfortable expansion of bourgeois conformity and the “well-designed mind” at the expense of the spiritual and the individual.

In Ireland, the opinionated expect an obvious type of art to arise, easily reached. Why such a form should come about has not been revealed even to me. It seems strange that it should when we have one of the most subtly-refined traditions of literature in the world, and a highly-complex folk music. (*TWA* 82)

The hovering question of the national qualities of Irish art in the 1960s obliquely raises political questions of cultural identity. J. D. Reed and Matthew Moss reply to Michael Kane’s polemic in the third issue of *Arena* against the Sartrean “bad faith” of the International Style and the New York School.<sup>38</sup> Reed implicitly recommends the local, the regional, the parochial as defined by Kavanagh. Responding in plain language to the appreciations of the Living Art Exhibition in 1962 and 1963 that passed for criticism, Desmond Fennell remarks:

Criticism was sympathetic toward all “innovation”, but there was in fact no innovation, only a great deal of copying of new styles or variations on old styles, all of which, whether old or new, had reached Ireland from abroad. ...The imitation of what were contemporary stylistic fashions elsewhere was confused with originality or innovation and praised as such. (*TWA* 109)

Fennell concludes his manifesto by asserting that “Two provincialisms have to be overcome: that of imitative eye-over-the-shoulder up-to-dateness and that of mediocre craftsmanship” (*TWA* 110). About his pictures in the 1963 Living Art exhibition, and painted since his return to Ireland from Rome, Moss reflects Fennell’s versions of parochialism in concrete terms:

they are unholy pictures, irreligious and unreligious art. They are paintings done from holy pictures, more truly, holy oliographs, the type depicting the Sacred Heart of this or Our Lady of th’other and changed into real painting. . . . (*TWA* 100)



These essays are complemented by Liam O'Connor's forty-four Whitmanesque aphorisms on "Representation": "I discover the structure of things, the hills fold and form in the lines I make, the figures of men stand out before them" (*TWA* 94).

That nonconformist stance appears also in the issue's essays that take up political themes directly, as in Paul Potts's "Ireland, Too, Has Her Colonies or at Least Her Colonials," where Potts contemplates the still erect Nelson Pillar from the porch of the General Post Office (*TWA* 95). In a memoir entitled, with Shavian irony, "The English Question," the poet Brian Higgins (1930–1965) takes a stand for Irish individuality against the "orthodox pattern of English Slavery," otherwise known as bourgeois conformity.<sup>39</sup> Accused once by the English poet George Barker of being a "beatnik," Higgins returned to Dublin after twelve years away, unwilling to "hang around for the English to be given their independence" (*TWA* 92).

In this last issue, however, the wealth of fiction overshadows *Arena's* homilies and gives best literary expression to the project's trio of bohemian themes. For example, James Plunkett (1920–2003) offers an extended passage from *Strumpet City* (1969). A tour-de-force, these paragraphs contrast the bourgeois with the immiserated—the Anglo-Irishman Mr. Yearling with the beggar Rashers Tierney—in Dublin directly before the Dublin Lock-Out of 1913. Then a writer of lively fiction, Tom MacIntyre offers a comic schoolboy tale of faith and superstition concerning a cure attributed to the Blessed Oliver Plunkett.<sup>40</sup> Later collected in *Dance the Dance* (1969), and set out in strong dialect, the story confirms the pious idiosyncrasies of the Irish. MacIntyre ends the boy's pilgrimage by bus with the dotty Mrs. Keegan to Drogheda with the narrator's surprising prostration before the shrine, and with Mrs. Keegan's sleight-of-hand theft of the Blessed Oliver's mummified head:

on the seat, sitting on her gloves, on her bag, the head. Like a charred potatoe [*sic*] from the back of the oven, only something live inside it. Earless, but listening to our hard silence. (*TWA* 90)

Ireland's religious heritage is treated differently in John Horgan's "Next Time Perhaps," set in the Ireland's monastic age—the Celtic Romanesque period—that Austin Clarke and Mervyn Wall exploited in their prose romances. Sitting with others at the feet of St. Colman and waiting for the second coming, Patric and Malachy are told to descend the mountain and meet a messenger—Toirleach the beggar—from the bishop condemning their vigil. Meanwhile, Colman, has been

...telling some children about the adventures of Cuchulain. It might have been something from the Gospels, Malachy thought testily; this was hardly the best way to ensure that Ireland would remain Christian. (*TWA* 103)

The remaining stories in the issue—by the American Beat Howard McCord, Patrick McGowan, and Brian Lynch—are less powerful. Chiefly a poet, Brian Lynch directly carried on the bohemian *Arena* tradition in three issues of *The Holy Door* (1965–1966) with nearly the same slate of contributors.<sup>41</sup>

The editors' choice of poetry for this last issue of *Arena* ranges from translations

of Eugenio Montale, Miguel Hernandez, and of Spanish folksongs by Pearse Hutchinson to signal contributions by Anthony Cronin, John Montague, Michael Hartnett, and Patrick Kavanagh, whose "Personal Problem" closes the issue.<sup>42</sup> Robert Graves's "Dynamite Barbee" starts off the issue in bluesy moment, and the American connections recur again in contributions by Howard McCord, Irving Feldman on the Holocaust, and Liddy, in "Homage to Lyndon Johnson."<sup>43</sup> Continental connections are registered both in the translations and in Harnett's "Thirteen Poems Written in Madrid," which sees the poet as "a scribe, a slave, / as in a roman garden" (TWA 105) in a totalitarian state. Probably with de Valéra and Catholic Ireland in mind, Harnett sees Spain itself as the "dream and lie" of Franco, to quote Picasso, and Caucasian Europe as exhausted: ". . . and I am not afraid to admit the threshings / of an anaemic state of order" (TWA 106). Anthony Cronin's three poems speak satirically to that exhaustion: "To be self-forgiven, / Indeed, admired, is surely one of the usual consolations / For suffering in a cause" (TWA 79). The painful conjunction of inert individual morality and unexamined communal ethos early 1960s Ireland constitutes the theme of John Montague's "Country Matters." Montague rounds out with an aphorism that now seems too easy, but then was harder to phrase: "For lack of courage / Sometimes equals lack of a language / And a word of love / Is hardest to say" (TWA 83). Prefaced by an epigraph by the American Modernist William Carlos Williams, "Country Matters" offers the other side of the coin from "The Siege of Mullingar," which led off *Arena's* second issue. In this last issue of *Arena*, the poems reiterate the forms and preoccupations of poems in other issues without advancing them to the degree that the essays and, especially, the issue's short stories do.<sup>44</sup>

*Arena's* stance against the gravities of late 1950s Irish society was informed not only by cultural dimensions of late Irish nationalism, but also by the newly broadcast social issues brought to the fore by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These were underscored by the shock of the Kennedy assassination on November 22, 1963, and again by the landslide election of Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Consequently, *Arena* shows Dublin Bohemia to be a counterweight to more mandarin expressions of Irish High Culture in the 1965 Yeats Centenary and official concatenations of Irish nationalism in the 1966 commemoration of the Easter Rising. The editors' wry complaint—and a wink over the pint—that "We done our best when we were let" registers the fact that, finances and the bounty of the state aside, *Arena's* four issues were published on the cusp of thorough-going, and not always salubrious, cultural change in the Republic. That sea-change was soon to be intensified by the moral authority of looming "Troubles" in the North.

But a backward glance shows that the literary legacy of *Arena*—at least in terms of such "little magazines" as *The Holy Door* (1965–1966), *The Lace Curtain* (1969–1978), and Hayden Murphy's *Broadsheet* (1968–1978)—eschewed the political and polemical. It did so because, at heart, *Arena* clung to an aesthetic, sometimes diffident, and always Romantic notion of the poet—whether Yeatsian bard or American Beat—as the archetypal figure of artist as saint—whether painter, sculptor, or novelist. Consequently, for most of the contributors to *Arena*, what mattered most was the Dedalian liberation of the poet into his or her art, rather than the communal liberation of a people or class into secular autonomy. Rather, another generation of academically based writers and "revisionism" took up that task in such mandarin reviews as *The Northern Review*, *Atlantis*, *The Crane Bag*, followed by the Field Day pamphlets and, ultimately, by *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*.

## Notes

1. Frank Shovlin gives a detailed account of *Envoy* that documents well the magazine's center of gravity—its focus on Patrick Kavanagh and figures associated with him in the 1950s. See Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923–1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 130–55. See also John Ryan's chapter on Kavanagh in *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (1975; Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1987), pp. 91–126, as well as Brian Fallon's pages on Irish literary magazines in *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture, 1930–1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), pp. 231–36.
2. See the individual entries in Tom Clyde, *Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003). Literary publishing in Northern Ireland exhibits the same contours, with *Lagan* (1944–1946) and *Rann* (1948–1953) and then the long-lived *Threshold I* (1957–1990) standing in for *Poetry Ireland*, *Envoy*, and *Irish Writing*.
3. Clyde, p. 46
4. Dublin and Dolmen were not the only sites for renewed magazine production in the Republic. For example, the Kilkenny Literary Society founded *The Kilkenny Magazine: An All-Ireland Review* in 1960. Ably edited by James Delahanty through 1970, *The Kilkenny Magazine* was known more for the strength of its fiction and poetry than for the strength of its essays and criticism. See Clyde, pp. 240–41.
5. For another view of *The Dolmen Miscellany*, consult David Gardiner, "Unsentimental Prophecy: John Montague and *The Dolmen Miscellany* (1962)," in *Well Dreams: Essays on John Montague*, ed. Thomas Dillon Redshaw (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2004), pp. 63–80.
6. Liam Miller, *Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, 1951–1976*, Dolmen Edition XXV (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 35.
7. The advertisements in the *Miscellany* suggest broader contexts for new Irish writing: an advertisement from *Encounter*, the high-toned London monthly now known to have been sponsored by the American Central Intelligence Agency; titles published by MacGibbon and Kee; a page given to Oxford University Press's Irish titles, especially those by Synge; a page from Faber and Faber featuring Beckett, Joyce, and Yeats; and a page of Dolmen titles by Kinsella, Clarke, Colum, and James Liddy. Two notices register the run-up to the Yeats Centenary with Macmillan's Irish Revival list and Dolmen's edition of Sheelah Kirby's *The Yeats Country*, issued four times from 1962 to 1969.
8. A line at the bottom of the cover reinforces the "official" character of the *Miscellany's* design and contents: "With the Co-operation of the Irish Academy of Letters." The pair of catalogues consists of *W. B. Yeats: A Centenary Exhibition* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, November 1965) and *Cuimhneacháin 1916: A Commemorative Exhibition of the Irish Rebellion, 1916* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, April 1966).
9. *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing*, ed. John Montague, Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, September 1962), p. [vii].
10. The author, engraver, and printer Robert Gibbings (1889–1958) was another figure connected to Eric Gill and his circle. Gibbings ran the Golden Cockerell Press from 1924–1933, and his accomplishments allowed the press to flourish through 1960. The Golden Cockerel Press may be counted as one of the models for Liam Miller's Dolmen Press (1951–1987). See Roderick Cave, Sarah Manson, *A History of The Golden Cockerel Press, 1920–1960* (London: The British Library, 2002; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2002).
11. Clyde, pp. 239–40.
12. Ruth Brandt's device appeared also on the cover of *Poetry Ireland* from 1981 through issue 17 in 1986. The first nine issues were again edited by John Jordan. Clyde, pp. 214–15.
13. Thomas Kinsella, *Poetry Ireland*, 7–8 (Spring, 1968), 116. See also Thomas Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland*, Peppercanister 18 (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995).
14. See Síghle-Bhreathnach-Lynch, "Revisionism, the Rising, and Representation," *New Hibernia Review*, 3, 1 (Spring, 1999), 82–96.
15. *The Dolmen Miscellany*, p. [vii].
16. Three poems from Thomas Kinsella's *Wormwood* start off the third issue of *Arena*. See Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Printing a Second Revival: Liam Miller's Dolmen Editions, 1966," *The South Carolina Review*, 34, 2 (Spring, 2002), 91–107.
17. Notably, both Liddy and *Arena* receive scant attention in such standard commentaries on twentieth-century Irish poetry as *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Neil Corcoran, *Poets of Modern Ireland: Text, Context, Intertext* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); John Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Still-*

*ness into History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and Gregory A. Schirmer, *Out of What Began: A History of Irish Poetry in English* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

18. James Liddy, "Introduction," *This Was Arena* (Naas: The Malton Press, 1982), p. 5; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (TWA 5).
19. The masthead of *Arena* is actually a note at the foot of each issue's cover page. James Liddy and Liam O'Connor are given as editors and the editorial offices as Coolgreany, Inch (and later, Gorey), County Wexford—Liddy's childhood home, actually. Liam Miller designed the typography and, presumably, the layout (TWA 7).
20. *Arena*, 1 (Spring, 1963) contains: "The Same Again," "Thank You, Thank You," "About Reason, Maybe," "That Garage," and "In Blinking Blankness: Three Efforts" (TWA 7–8). *Arena*, 2 (Autumn, 1963) contains: "The Poet's Ready Reckoner" (TWA 34). *Arena*, 3 (Summer, 1964) contains "A Summer Morning Walk" (TWA 55). *Arena*, 4 (Spring, 1965) contains "Personal Problem" (TWA 114).
21. Antoinette Quinn characterizes Kavanagh's conversion thus: "Patrick Kavanagh underwent surgery for lung cancer in the Rialto Hospital, Dublin in March 1955. . . . [I]t was the banks of the Grand Canal that he singled out as the site of the climactic experience of his life, the locus of his ultimate aesthetic revelation. . . . By 1959 Kavanagh had conceived his supreme fiction: that he had been born or reborn as a poet on the banks of Dublin's Grand Canal in July 1955." Antoinette Quinn, *Patrick Kavanagh: A Critical Study* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), pp. 376–77.
22. Publishing Kavanagh could be a frustrating experience. Regarding *Arena's* acquisition of Kavanagh's "A Summer Morning Walk," Liddy recalls: "This wrangle took so long I was late opening the Joyce Tower in the afternoon; the blue rinse stamp of foot was taking place as I rushed down Sandycove from the bus. Paddy subsequently crossed out eight stanzas when he proofread it—but I got no refund" (TWA 5).
23. In his year-by-year history of Ireland in the 1960s, Fergal Tobin observes that "The heroic period in the revival of Irish social and economic life ended in the 1963. . . . From 1964 onward, however, the euphoria of the early sixties began to dissipate." Fergal Tobin, *The Best of Decades: Ireland in the 1960s* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), p. 95.
24. Other notable poems in the second issue of *Arena* are Austin Clarke's "Cypress Grove," Patrick Kavanagh's "The Poet's Ready Reckoner," and Paul Durcan's "The X-Poet Sings to the Spirit of His Native Land." Kavanagh's poem registers the Beat note: "And William H. Burroughs collages the poem / As the curfew tolls the knell of Gray" (TWA 33). Liddy recalls some "rough bargaining" for the poem: "Paddy read it at the lunchtime negotiating table in McDaid's, laughing and crying. . ." (TWA 5).
25. In the original printing of *Arena* (Fall, 1963), Liam Miller laid out "Tao" as a separate insert (37.5 x 12.5 cms.) of eight pages printed on light green paper.
26. The first part of Liddy's "document" is the fine poem "Song for James Baldwin," done up in a lambent blues mode and, unaccountably, missing from Liddy's *Collected Poems* (1994). Liddy's allusions recall another example of neutral Ireland's postwar conscience in "Aifreann na Marbh" ("Mass for the Dead") in Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, *Lux Aeterna* (Dublin: Hodges and Figgis, 1961).
27. A literary journalist, memoirist, and poet, Paul Potts published *To Keep a Promise* (1970) in which he supported the struggles for independence of Ireland and Israel.
28. To the second issue Miller contributed four paragraphs to *Arena's* salute to Louis MacNeice (1907–1973) that cite, particularly, MacNeice's contribution to verse drama and claim that "Writing was for [MacNeice] an adventure" (TWA 34). A decade later, Miller published *Time Was Away: The World of Louis MacNeice*, ed. Terence Brown, Alec Reid (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, December 1974), a companion to *The World of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Robin Skelton, Ann Saddlemyer (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, June 1965), a Yeats Centenary volume.
29. "The Road Ahead" also appeared in John Montague's landmark collection *Death of a Chieftain and Other Stories* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1964), pp. 88–92.
30. Howard McCord's first book was *Precise Fragments*, privately printed by the Dolmen Press (November, 1963) and not listed by Miller in *Dolmen XXV*. More a Western writer than a Beat, McCord has published some fifty titles with small and university presses in the United States, culminating in his 2002 *Complete Poems*. See Guy Birchard, "Howard McCord Bibliography." [www.possibilityx.com/hm/bibliography.htm](http://www.possibilityx.com/hm/bibliography.htm). June 8, 2005.
31. A poet and novelist, Christy Brown (1932–1981) is best known by way of Daniel Day Lewis's portrayal of him in the 1989 film of Brown's autobiography *My Left Foot* (1954).
32. A fixture in Bohemian Dublin in the 1960s and early 1970s, Leland Bardwell began publishing poetry with *The Mad Cyclist* (1970), and has since then published four novels, two collections of stories, and three



- plays. These lyrics do not appear in Bardwell's *The White Beach: New and Selected Poems, 1960–1998* (Cliffs of Moher: Salmonpoetry, 1998).
33. An exile from the United States, with homes in Mallorca and in Dublin, and a Poundian provocateur, Anthony Kerrigan is best known for his many translations from the Spanish. In the 1960s he published five titles with Miller's Dolmen Press: *Hiro Ishibashi*, *Yeats and the Nob* (1966); *Espousal in August* (1968); *At the Front Door of the Atlantic* (1969); Jorge Luis Borges, *Irish Strategies* (1963); and *The Hojoki: Japanese Classic from the Year 1212* (1979).
  34. The dramatist and sculptor James McKenna (1933–2002) was one of the organizers of the Independent Artists Group in June, 1960, formed as an alternative to the "official" annual shows of the Exhibition of Living Art. The Independent Artists movement gave rise in 1967 to the Project Arts Centre.
  35. A seminal, but thorny figure in American Modernism, Edward Dahlberg (1900–1977) wrote *Do These Bones Live?* (1941) and *The Sorrows of Priapus* (1957), both texts important to the Black Mountain poets and the Beat movement.
  36. A jurist, Little's father—also named Philip Francis Little—was the first prime minister of Newfoundland. Austin Clarke excerpted this vignette from his memoir *A Penny in the Clouds* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1968).
  37. This excerpt comes from Kerrigan's translation of Miguel de Unamuno's *Our Lord Don Quixote: The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho, with Related Essays* (Princeton: The Bollingen Foundation, 1967). Unamuno's introductory essay "The Sepulchre of Don Quixote" proposes that Quixote is a fictional incarnation of the national "mind" of Spain.
  38. A staff writer and novelist, J. D. Reed is a neo-New York School poet. Among his collections are: *Expressways* (1969), *Whiskey Profiles* (1971) and *Fatback Odes* (1972).
  39. Brian Higgins published two collections of poems: *The Only Need* (1961) and *Notes While Travelling* (1964). A third collection, *The Northern Fiddler*, appeared in 1966 just after his death.
  40. Today McIntyre is far better known as an inventive playwright. Notably, in 1983 McIntyre created a successful stage adaptation of Patrick Kavanagh's famous long poem *The Great Hunger* (1942).
  41. Clyde, pp. 245–46. Brian Lynch went on to publish five collections of poems with, first, New Writers' Press, and then with Dermot Bolger's Raven Arts.
  42. Liddy's contributor's note on Hernandez pointedly observes that he was a friend of Pablo Neruda and "died in 1941 from the effects of imprisonment by the Falange" (*TWA* 114). The Spanish interest shown in this last number of *Arena* owes much to Anthony Kerrigan's presence in Dublin, as Liddy notes: "... Anthony Kerrigan a polyglot man of letters who was middleman for so many of the pieces . . ." (*TWA* 5).
  43. Irving Feldman's poem later went into his collection *The Pripet Marshes* (1965).
  44. A number of other Irish poets appear in this last issue: Leland Bardwell, Brian Higgins, and Lorna Reynolds. Several poets in this issue appear in the Dolmen Press list: Michael Hartnett, Pearse Hutchinson, Anthony Kerrigan, James J. McAuley, John Montague, Michael Smith, Sidney Bernard Smith, Richard Weber, and Liddy himself.