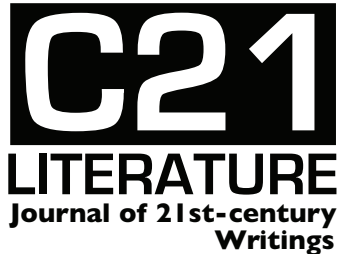




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## Article

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ARTICLE

## 'Dublin You Are': Representations of Dublin in Twenty-First Century Irish Poetry

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This article probes the different representations of Dublin in twenty-first century Irish poetry. There is an examination of the works of Stephen James Smith, Colm Keegan and Rachael Hegarty and how all three poets offer different representations of Dublin post-Celtic Tiger. Smith's work will be shown to value the cultural and artistic heritage of the city while Keegan's poetry offers a social commentary on the state of the capital city in the wake of the last economic collapse. Hegarty's representation of Dublin looks at the natural and ecological world as a way of transcending the cosmopolitan nature of the urban city. While Smith, Keegan and Hegarty all celebrate their native city in their poetry there is also a strong sense of critique that exudes from their representations of post-Celtic Tiger Dublin.

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**Keywords:** Smith; Keegan; Hegarty; Dublin; post-Celtic Tiger; Poetry

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Dublin as a place within Irish literature is presented in varying forms. The representation of Dublin in the work of Seán O'Casey and his three Dublin plays presents a city in the crosshairs of revolution while Brendan Behan critiques Dublin, and indeed Ireland, in certain plays like *The Quare Fellow* and *The Hostage*. James Joyce's *Ulysses* details the events of a single day in the capital city as it is experienced through the eyes of both Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, with Joyce's *Dubliners* also detailing the everyday life of the people who make up the city. These texts focus on the individual's experience within the city in order to demonstrate the universal with Joyce himself noting that 'for myself, I always write about Dublin because, if I can get to the heart of Dublin, I can get to the heart of all cities in the world. In the particular is contained the universal' (Ellmann 1976: 505). More recently, writers such

as Paula Meehan and Eavan Boland have redefined the Dubliner's experience in their work, as has Dermot Bolger with his *Ballymun Trilogy* which charts the generation, demolition and regeneration of Ballymun. In Bolger's work we are very often given a representation of working-class Dublin, or more recently in works like *The Fall of Ireland* and *Tanglewood* offered a representation of Dublin and Ireland after the financial crises of 2008. In her 1999 collection *The Lost Land* Eavan Boland writes of Dublin noting:

Dawn on the river:  
 Dublin rises out of what reflects it:  
 Anna Liffey  
 Looks to the east, to the sea,  
 Her profile carved out by the light  
 On the old Carlisle bridge. (Boland 1999: 22)

Similarly, Paula Meehan's poetry often celebrates inner city Dublin as do her works for theatre. In *Mrs Sweeney* (1997) we see the old mythical tale of Mad Sweeney (*Buile Suibhne*) used to address Dublin's issue of drug abuse. In Meehan's version of the Irish mythical tale Mr. Sweeney turns mad and becomes the bird-king after living through his own daughter's death from heroin use. What I have attempted to trace in the opening of this article is the heterogeneous nature of representations of Dublin within Irish literature and that the city has changed drastically from that period to the one that exists now.

The very nature of the urban landscape is multi-faceted and heterogeneous, it is ever changing and expanding as a result of national and global economics. Drawing on the work of Jeremy Tambling, Maria Beville and Deirdre Flynn note in their introduction to *Irish Urban Fictions* that:

The city is dysfunctional in its relationship with the imagined community because it provides a sustained challenge to national consensus and participates in global economics and culture. As such, there is no single history of the city to be told' (Beville & Flynn 2018: 10)

The city exists in the mind, in the imagination, and in memory, and is interwoven with the personal experiences and identity of the individual. Stephen James Smith, Colm Keegan and Rachael Hegarty all offer representations of post-Celtic Tiger Dublin and all offer a modern mythologization of the city. Gerry Smyth posed the question in his critical work on the Celtic Tiger: 'what does it mean – what can it mean – to be Irish in the wake of the Celtic Tiger' (Smyth 2012: 136) and these three poets offer new avenues in contemporary poetry in answering that question through the lens of contemporary Dublin.

Firstly, the style and form of their work is both innovative and new and is characterised by the landscape and issues they are addressing – mainly those of identity, austerity, and how nature can sustain against the turmoil of the financial collapse. Smith's poetry has a sense of musicality and orality to it. The rhyming employed is very often staggered, unstructured and unconventional. Smith allows broad vowel sounds enable a flow and rhythm to 'Dublin You Are' while the strong 'b', 't', and 'd' sounds force the tongue to patter across the page:

Dublin your tower blocks and tenements  
 Are an excuse for a solution  
 Dublin c'mere 'till I tell ya  
 You can be more than  
 Rapid dirtbirds and banjaxed bowsies,  
 Alrigh' story bud and yeah sure it's all good,  
 Jaysis that's scaldy  
 Why Go Baldy  
 I'm excira and delira,  
 Dublin I cry for ya! (Smith 2018:13)

The language used is also deeply rooted in the Dublin vernacular. This is important in the context of placing the poetry and sees Smith offer a modern mythologization of Dublin's culture and linguistic intonation in his poetry. Colm Keegan's *Randomer* is also an innovative collection written in his Dublin vernacular. The collection and the

poems are representative of life during austerity in Dublin. The events and images that Keegan chooses are mundane and ordinary – a decking, a dolls house, a river, the pawn shop – and charts the 'sacrifices we were forced to make' (Keegan 2018: 40) during the economic crash. Many of the poems lack a coherent structure with stanza's often varying in length from five lines of prose verse, to couplets that do not rhyme, to a single line, and then back to four lines of prose verse as is the case in a poem like 'This Voice'. Keegan's distinctive style erupts in 'The Weight of Homelessness' as he again use couplets and tercets that do not rhyme in a conventional sense and structures this through the impact of a single line stanza. Although there is no apparent rhyming scheme in a conventional sense, Keegan skilfully links words together through the strong 'd' sounds and lengthy vowel sounds employed in lines like 'Think of the dollhouse you bought for your daughter/so huge, it loomed over all of the other presents' (Keegan 2018: 41). This fractured structure in many of his poems acts as a way of reflecting the fractured nature of society in the post-Celtic Tiger landscape. Likewise, Hegarty's *Flight Paths over Finglas* is a deeply innovative and skilful collection of poetry. In poems like 'Appalachian Wife', 'Teacher for the Blind', and 'Run, Ma, Run' we are delivered a masterpiece in innovation and a stylistically unique kind of poetry – 'Appalachian Wife' is shaped like a mountain, 'Teacher for the Blind' has lines blanked out or redacted, and 'Run, Ma, Run', a poem written to remember the Dublin bombings of May 1974 which Hegarty as a young girl witnessed with her mother, sees words skirted across the page like shattered glass. Hegarty is free and comfortable in breaking new stylistic ground within her poetry and does so wonderfully in her Dublin vernacular also. In terms of style alone, all three poets offer something new, innovative and exciting to Irish poetry in the twenty-first century and their work will be of vital importance to shaping the literary landscape of Ireland, and indeed Dublin, in the future.

Much of Stephen James Smith's poetry is deeply rooted in Dublin as seen in 'Anto for Taoiseach' and 'An Ode to Tony McMahon's Den'. In reference to Gerry Smyth's question about what it means to be Irish in the wake of the Celtic Tiger in 'Anto for Taoiseach' Smith attempts to focus on the common decency of kindness and generosity. Actions are deemed worthier than commodities, excess and affluence within the poem:

It makes me sad, and glad  
 To see life living in the spirit  
 Of a poor man giving  
 'cause when I look at him I see just  
 How futile that life can be,  
 And how he's richer than D4, (Smith 2018: 59)

Smith's work pushes back against the capitalism and the commodification that occurred during the Celtic Tiger years in favour of the cultural capital of art, kindness, and a recognition of the ordinary events of our lives. Eóin Flannery aptly suggests that 'art and culture became commoditized during the Celtic Tiger years and the idioms of Irish creative expression were also often warped by the imported and reifying codes of global capitalism. Where culture was not commoditized, it was alienated from Irish society, as the self-reflexive, often critical, function of public art was no longer relevant in a culture defined by consumption and self-congratulation' (Flannery 2014: 204). Smith's post-Celtic Tiger poetry positions communal musical events such as that described in 'An Ode to Tony McMahon's Den' as a way of transcending the economic disaster. The poem describes how people 'attune to a new frequency/...We are liberated/and we vibrated to each other' (Smith 2018: 95). Since so much of Smith's poetry focuses on culture, identity, the artistic, and the simple events of life, the liberation that takes place when these issues are focused on is a liberation from the shackles of austerity and debt. For Smith, the new frequency that Ireland should focus on is not one of excess, but a sense of togetherness attained through the artistic.

Perhaps one of Smith's most well-known poems is 'Dublin You Are', a list poem that addresses the current state of Dublin as well as its history:

Dublin you are grey brick upon brick,  
 Full of tarmac and hipster pricks?  
 Just face it, all other places Pale in comparison,  
 You are more than some former Saxon garrison. (Smith 2018: p.12)

The opening question suggests that what follows is not a definitive characterisation of the city but rather a possibility of what the city is. The representation

that Smith delivers is not one that is concrete but one that is fluid and malleable. In choosing to open the poem with a question Smith leaves the door open for others to agree or disagree with his representation of the city that he comes from. The rhyming couplets that open the poem also suggest a sense of linkage to the past, a link that was broken during the intensity of development and excess. The new Ireland of economic wealth that was born during the Celtic Tiger years is in stark contrast to that of the economic bleakness of pre 1990s Ireland. Daniel Becker suggests that 'Celtic Tiger Ireland developed a new dominant perspective on the historical predecessors that orchestrated a collective break from history' (Becker 2018: p.94) but Smith is wary of the dangers of breaking with history in a literary and historical sense and as such in the wake of the depravity of the Tiger years returns to represent and celebrate Dublin's rich cultural heritage in 'Dublin You Are'. The opening initially signals the colonial heritage of Dublin in its references to the Pale, that historical area surrounding Dublin from 1300–1596 where 'until the final subjugation of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the extent of the pale symbolized the state of English fortunes in Ireland' (Edwards & Hourican 2005: 80). Furthermore, the opening does not only view colonial invasion as being purely British but also undertaken by the Saxons – a Germanic tribe from nowadays Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. These initial lines are important to the overall trajectory of the poem because from the outset we realise that Smith is delivering a heterogeneous celebration of Dublin's diversity and probing the cultural wealth of the city as opposed to its economic value. The opening is also deeply intertextual and reminds us of that Louis MacNeice poem 'The closing album', and specifically Section I of the sequence, 'Dublin', in 'grey brick upon brick' (MacNeice 1966: 163) and 'Fort of the Dane/Garrison of the Saxon' (MacNeice 1966: 164), signalling the cultural and literary wealth that sustains the rest of the poem. While the historical is imperative to the poem Smith does not shy away from current problems in the city either with Jeremy Tambling suggesting that 'the modern city challenges writers to think anew, how to work with the difference it makes; in forming a writer's consciousness, it creates new modes of writing' (Tambling 2016: 1). Smith's poem is a renewed evaluation of post Celtic-Tiger Dublin:

Dublin when did you go from,  
The clash of the ash, to exchanging gold for cash?

Smith questions the effect of global economics on the cultural wealth of Dublin. In their introduction to *Recalling the Celtic Tiger* Brian Lucey, Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien comment that after the Troika bailout of 2010 commenced Ireland went 'from a period of unparalleled prosperity, [...] Ireland as a nation suddenly descended into a period of grim austerity, with emigration replacing immigration, repossession replacing property acquisition, and bank debt replacing bank credit' (Lucey et al 2019: 3). Smith's response to this is a probing of identity in the wake of the economic recession and the effect that it had upon the cultural underpinnings of the city. There is also a strong sense that post-Celtic Tiger Dublin is still haunted by the past in that multinational companies still reside within Dublin and demonstrate the same ideologies that initially caused the last economic collapse:

No longer the second city, yet you play second fiddle  
to Google and Guinness,  
to Facebook and unsociable twits.  
Dublin look at yourself. (Smith 2018: 12)

The ancient Irish sport of hurling played with sticks fashioned from ash trees, 'the clash of the ash' (Smith 2018: 12) and has a place in the Irish mythological story of Cú Chulainn is in complete juxtaposition to the culturally redundant multinational companies of Google, Guinness and Facebook. The remnants of corporatism and economic excess signified by the Celtic Tiger, and these companies, still lingers in modern Dublin but also the haunting aura of colonisation. Tayyab Mahmud suggests that:

The historical role of debt in moral discipline is evidenced by the fact that in all Indo-European languages, words for debt are synonymous with those for sin or guilt. Debt has also played a foundational role in modern imperial domination. During the colonial era, colonial powers often intervened militarily to enforce debt contracts. After decolonization, conditions



accompanying international credits were deployed to control public policies of postcolonial formations. The recurrent international debt crises of the last three decades were used to enforce neoliberal restructuring of economies of debtor states' (Mahmud 2012: 482).

In an Irish context this point is rather telling, and Smith's poem is attuned to Mahmud's assertions playing out in Dublin. Smith cleverly links the restrictive nature of Ireland's colonial past with the economic restrictions of debt in post Celtic Tiger Ireland. However, Smith seeks hope in Dublin's history of various and intermingled traditions through tracing the etymology of Dublin; 'Dublin, Dyflin, Eblana, Baile Átha Cliath' (Smith 2018: 12). Dublin signifies the modern day anglicization of the place while Dyflin represents the Norse element of the city's historical heritage. Dyflin derives from the old Irish name of the place, Dubh Linn (Black Pool), presumably in reference to the river Liffey and its first written record can be found in the Annals of Ulster dating from 841 A.D. While Dyflin may represent the Norse city of commerce and trade, Smith's reference to Eblana further adds to the multiplicity of historic identities in terms of the etymology of Dublin. Eblana is of Greek origin and is regarded as originating from the naming of the place in 140 A.D by Ptolemy. In *The Dublin Penny Journal*, published in June of 1832, Philip Dixon Hardy writes that:

The Geographer Ptolemy, places (A.D. 140) a town exactly in the parallel of Dublin, and calls it "Civitas Eblana". Our city therefore has a just claim to an antiquity of seventeen centuries. But, we are inclined to suppose, that though the Greek cosmographer had good reason to lay down such a place as "Civitas Eblana" yet it is to the VIKINGAR – pirates, or "Sea Kings", of Scandinavia – that the settlement of Dublin, as a place of commerce, and as a fortified town may be attributed". (Hardy 1832: 1).

Smith then goes on to reference the modern Irish place name of Dublin, "Baile Átha Cliath", which further pluralises the identities at play within the poem. This name extends from an old settlement on the river Liffy named Áth Cliath (ford of hurdles).

In *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, Daniel Bristow interrogates the origins of this place name and determines that:

Reference to the locality is occasionally found in early Irish mythology, e.g the story of *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel* (the location of which is south of the modern day city), in which Conare is told at Áth Cliath that he will become king of Eirú (Ireland), by a bird named Namglan. (Bristow 2016: 95)

Even a brief etymological probing of the poet's use of historical place names suggests how Dublin is opened-up to numerous identities. Smith ties these older identities with the newer, hybrid naming of the place through the '180 other tongues your citizens use to name ya...' (Smith 2018: 12) in a connection that links the city of the past with the city of the present through the different languages used by the citizens of Dublin after the influx of immigrants seeking work during the Celtic Tiger.

Smith references poets, actors, singers and other writers from Dublin that encompass its vast cultural heritage. The international prestige of these individuals is not important to Smith, the focus is merely on their contribution to the celebration of the local. It is the cultural that is of value and not economic wealth:

Margaret Dunne dancing on O'Connell Street,  
The Diceman Tom McGinty miming on Grafton Street,  
Pat Ingoldsby with his poems on Westmoreland Street. (Smith 2018: 13)

The rhyming of three lines consistently in 'Street' is not seen elsewhere in the poem and suggests that Smith may be drawing us towards the importance of these communal areas, areas where art is practiced within the city. In another list poem, 'My Ireland', Smith notes that 'My Ireland can let go of all its cares,/it has the arts' (Smith 2018: 114) which further suggests that for Smith the artistic has the ability to transcend the hardships endured after the Celtic Tiger. These are the people who are famous on the streets of Dublin for their own ordinary yet beautiful place within the city. The naming of both place and individual reinforces the modern mythologization that is taking place within the poem. The Celtic Tiger was an attack on Irish identity

and the poetry that we now see not only questions the acts that occurred during that period but also seeks to redefine Irish identity post Celtic Tiger. Gerry Smyth, writing in 2012, comments that 'the waves from that momentous, ignominious fall are still crashing on the shores of the Irish consciousness today. The levels of corruption, ignorance, incompetence and sheer stupidity that precipitated economic disaster shocked everyone' (Smyth 2012: 136). I would argue that this still holds true today and Smith is attuned to the ways in which Ireland foolishly built an economy on speculation, foreign investment and poor banking regulations: 'Dublin you're European, but you could be Craggy Island in/disguise?' (Smith 2012: 15). 'Dublin You Are' is as much a celebration of Dublin as it is a wandering list poem of the poet attempting to understand and define what it means to be a Dubliner in the post-Celtic Tiger wasteland:

You are the Poolbeg Towers,  
And the poor shower  
Begging on Bachelor's Walk. (Smith 2012: 14)

Where the artistic and colonial diversity at the start of the poem signalled Smith's desire for heterogeneity and inclusivity of all, in Dublin of the twenty-first century the poet's plea does not waver or change. His desire is for Dublin to be a city for all to enjoy and live in, a city he adores and wishes to share with others:

Dublin you are full of Polish  
and Brazilians speaking Portuguese,  
and now the Chinese  
have turned Parnell Street into Chinatown.  
Dublin don't let them down. (Smith 2018: 14)

Although the economic wealth experienced by some people during the economic boom is gone, what remains is stronger and of more value for Smith: art, kindness and the beauty of Dublin's streets. The poem captures the complexity of Irish identity and holds fast to the belief that despite the economic downfall that through art the city and its people can find an avenue of solace and celebration.

Smith maintains that Dublin's foundation as a centre of multiple identities and varying artistic expressions will carry on and shape the current and future state of the city.

My city,  
*Mo chroí,*  
I love you,  
most of the time.  
You see...  
Dublin You Are  
Me! (Smith 2018: 16)

While the first eight lines of the poem were written in rhyming couplets and then moved to a more free style, the final lines of the poem once again signal a sense of structure through the rhyming of 'city', 'chroí', 'see', and 'Me'. This sense of structure and the form of the poem suggests a sense of unity but also a sense of things being finalised and tied up. Dublin's identity itself is vast and expansive and therefore the staggered and often jagged rhyming throughout reflects the multiple turns and identities that run through the poem.

While Dublin as a site of artistic imagination and influence is deeply bound to the poetry of Stephen James Smith, Colm Keegan's realistic and gritty portrayal of the city in the post-Celtic Tiger era is wonderfully expressed in his second collection *Randomer*. His poetry is rooted in the everyday speech patterns and linguistic traits of the city. Dublin, especially the Northside side of the city, exudes from the page of Keegan's work. Although the poems can be read in a manner that elevates them to the shared space of understanding and universality that comes with artistic engagement, Keegan's work never loses that close and poignant link with the personal. Keegan's vision of the world is poured into poems like 'This Voice', 'Shebeen Shaman' and 'The Weight of Homelessness'. Although there is a deep love of Dublin within the collection it is not represented as a site of cultural wealth. Instead, Keegan's work offers a realistic appraisal of the city in the wake of the economic downfall and focuses on the struggles of the individual.

While *Randomer* offers brief moments of empathy and strength in poems like 'Usurper' and 'Punk Mother', the focus here will be on Keegan's portrayal of Dublin after the economic collapse of 2008. In 'Console' Keegan points towards the corruption and inequality that embodied the end of the Celtic Tiger:

And now the game's corrupt.  
All that I saved is gone. (Keegan 2018: 37)

The affect that the Celtic Tiger had on people is largely unrecognised in the aftermath as the discourse is dominated by statistics and economic jargon. Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien comment that 'the Celtic Tiger, for good or ill, affected people, society, culture, lived lives; this has gone largely unnoticed in the current crises, with its predominant focus on matters economic' (Maher & O'Brien 2014: 9). Keegan's poetry captures the individual experiences of those most affected by the Celtic Tiger. Poems like 'Decking' and 'Austerity' hold a political weight to them. They are not political poems in the sense of calling for a revolution but do call out the inherent inequality caused by the Celtic Tiger. 'Decking' addresses the economic impact upon the individual with the constant use of 'you' universalising the experience within the poem:

You bought it with borrowed money,  
Hired some foreign bodies to install it  
While building onto the house you spent  
So much time telling your friends about (Keegan 2018: 31).

The form of the poem does not seem to obey any clear structure or rhyming scheme. Instead, the disjointed nature of the poem's structure reflects the disjointedness of the time period that is being addressed. Structure and certainty in the post-Celtic Tiger era in a financial sense has been removed and therefore the lack of a coherent structure in the poem reinforces the sense of incoherence in society. In terms of rhyme the poem focuses on strong 'b' sounds and the vowels 'o' and 'u'. This enables the poem to flow in a manner that mimics speech patterns but also the sense that despite there being no clear overall structure to society or the poem that brief

moments of rhyme and reason are still possible in the midst of chaos. Seán O' Riain comments that 'behind the public face of its status as the "poster child" of austerity in Europe, Ireland was poised on a knife-edge between potentially unsustainable debt and the growing social and political costs of recession and fiscal consolidation' (O'Riain 2014: 1). O'Riain's analysis here is important as it gives an insight into the economic situation that Ireland found itself in after the Celtic Tiger. The political and imagined version of what Ireland came to be after the economic collapse was entirely different from the reality and Keegan's poetry acts as a social commentary to this period in the nation's recent history. Where Smith's poetry seeks a return to culture and the arts as a way of sustaining against the downfall, Keegan's poetry explores the everyday reality of post-Celtic Tiger Dublin:

Off you vaulted yourself, into the realm  
Of credit, the second mortgage, the life  
Forever inventing itself on the billboard. (Keegan 2018: 31)

This capitalistic model that sells a lifestyle and commodifies existence is one that had a strong part to play in the economic collapse from 2008 onwards in Ireland when the 'merry go round of easy money stopped' (Keegan 2018: 31). In an era where buying objects and new technology became an index of success Keegan goes on to question why this is the case. Over ten years later Keegan's work examines the impact of property speculators, political decisions and poor banking practices through the lens of the nameless victim within the poem, but also the sense of guilt and shame associated with the Celtic Tiger period. Fintan O'Toole outlines what needs to be done in order to move on from the economic crash in *Enough is Enough: How to build a New Republic*: 'there has to be a whole new kind of intolerance – not for those who are different, but for greed, cynicism and the pursuit of private gain at the expense of the public good' (O'Toole 2011: 236). While I would argue that overall Keegan is attempting to shed light on the individual impact people suffered after the boom years in Ireland, the poem does nothing at the end to suggest that a change will ever come about. The stagnation of the wooden decking, once new, is now seen to be 'covered

in reptile green slime' and 'won't support a single step' (Keegan 2018: 32). While the item itself may seem trivial it shows the extent to which ordinary individuals who bought these items on credit suffered but how many of those who propagated loose banking regulations did not:

And your decking won't support a single step,  
is covered in reptile green slime, lies  
silent like a criminal outside, waiting  
to crack your coccyx, break your aging hip  
or put a chip in that corruptible Irish  
smile of yours that started it all. (Keegan 2018: 32)

In Smith's poetry we see a return to the cultural underpinnings of the city as a way of escaping the turmoil caused by the Celtic Tiger, while Keegan examines the 'sacrifices we were forced to make' (Keegan 2018: 40) and the impact of those sacrifices. The loss of culture and place in the post-Celtic Tiger landscape seems to shine through in that there is no clear understanding of how such a cataclysmic event could have been brought about, and this can be seen in the poem 'Bering Strait':

Our tribe has endured this trial so long  
We almost forget where we're from. (Keegan 2018: 40).

The economic growth that Ireland underwent during the 1990s and into the early 2000s was unprecedented and was fuelled by 'flexible financial and planning regulations, a low corporate tax, and a blind eye turned to white-collar crime and corruption between developers and planning agencies, provided huge opportunities for growth' (Maher & O'Brien 2014: 3). These huge opportunities of growth for property developers and bankers as Maher and O'Brien have termed it resulted in even bigger losses for the common individual. The impact of poor regulations in the Irish economic model still has a lasting effect in the present with Keegan suggesting in 'Bering Strait' that 'we are bound to all that we have given up./It lingers in our wake like a ghost' (Keegan 2018: 40).

The critical approach that Keegan takes within his poetry is not because of a hatred of the city, or its people, but rather from a position of understanding and care. His work provides a social commentary and a snapshot of the times in modern-day Dublin where in a poem like 'The Weight of Homelessness' which outlines a materialistic approach to life at the beginning of the poem and a circling back to poverty at the end, just like in 'Decking'. The structure of the poem is symbolic of the trajectory of the Celtic Tiger – a downward slope towards inequality and poverty:

Think of every material thing, as a tiny hook.

A way to keep your grip on life. (Keegan 2018: 41)

These opening lines question the neoliberal claim that working hard will garner reward, and that this in turn will bring happiness. As Steve Loyal suggests in his appraisal of the Celtic Tiger:

The "Celtic Tiger" has come to provide a convenient shorthand for Ireland's prosperous and rapidly growing economy. Like all metaphors, it occludes as much as it includes; as a way of representing, it is as much a way of misrepresenting. The implication of a prosperity in which "a rising tide lifts all boats" masks the growth of poverty and inequality and generalises what is, in fact, only a restricted experience of newly found wealth, within a broader context of class and gender stratification and regional underdevelopment. (Loyal 2003: 74)

Drawing on the work of Kieran Allen, Michael Pierse in *Writing Dublin's Working Class: Dublin After O'Casey* carries on this point when he notes that 'while the perception of generally increased wealth in Ireland has undoubtedly been embedded in a real, unprecedented increase in living standards across the board, it may be surprising for some to consider that, even in Ireland's boom years, "workers [were] receiving a lower share of the wealth they [were] producing than before"' (Pierse 2011: 10). On a national level, according to the homeless charity Focus Ireland 'there were 10,271 people homeless in the week of January 20 – 26 2020 across Ireland. This



figure includes adults and children. The number of homeless families has increased by 302% since January 2015' (Focus Ireland 2020). While these figures are striking, Keegan's presentation of the individual experience of homelessness with children is harrowing. The image of the dollhouse in the poem is strikingly symbolic of the suffering not only endured by adults, but children:

Picture the pleasure of putting that dollhouse together,  
One of the last things you do before it all falls apart.  
Now think of your daughter crying about the dollhouse  
While you walk the streets, or sleep in your car. (Keegan 2018: 41)

The structure to the poetry is unclear and symbolic of the fractured reality that the poem is representing. O'Toole suggests that 'booms always engender hysteria but what made the Irish one so extreme was that it was filling a void. The Celtic Tiger wasn't just an economic ideology. It was also a substitute identity. It was a new way of being that arrived just at the point when Catholicism and nationalism were not working any more. At its cheapest, this identity expressed itself in a mad consumerism, in an arrogance toward the rest of the world, in a willful refusal of all ties of history and tradition' (O'Toole, 2011: 3–4). The dollhouse also acts as a way of reinforcing O'Toole's main argument that consumerism acted as a way of enacting 'arrogance toward the rest of the world':

Think of the dollhouse you bought for your daughter  
So huge, it loomed over all of the other presents.  
Think of the neighbours knocking  
At your front door to gasp in awe.  
Think of her little cousin's pupils dilated with envy. (Keegan 2018: 41)

It is in the decline and aftermath of the economic boom when the material is taken away that the weight of the disaster reaches its peak. There is a juxtaposition within the poem between the pressure to outdo others through consumerism with the pressure of survival while being homeless. The final line of the poem sees Keegan place the onus on the reader to imagine what this experience may feel like: 'Think of that

pressure everyday' (Keegan 2018: 41). Slavoj Žižek asserts that although capitalism ultimately causes these economic collapses, it does not suffer. It is not capitalism that is left in crises just those who engaged in the fallacy:

Advocates of capitalism often point out that, in spite of all the critical prophecies, capitalism is overall, from a global perspective, not in crises but progressing more than ever – and one cannot but agree with them. Capitalism thrives all around the world (more or less), from China to Africa. It is definitely not in crises – it is just the people caught in this explosive development that are in crises. This tension between overall rapid growth and local crises and misery is part of capitalism's normal functioning: capitalism renews itself through such crises. (Žižek 2018: 23)

While in 'Bering Strait' Keegan suggests that 'beyond the horizon, our destination/hope' (Keegan 2018: 40), the reality of that hope in post-Celtic Tiger Dublin is played out in the final lines of 'Pawned':

I didn't get as much as I thought.  
Nobody ever does. (Keegan 2018: 49)

So far, we have seen two different representations of Dublin after the economic crash. Rachael Hegarty's first collection of poetry, *Flight Paths Over Finglas*, is one that celebrates the ordinary, everyday magic of the city itself. The poems selected here for discussion show suburban Dublin to be a place of the rural and the urban. Finglas, the setting of much of the collection, is a Dublin suburb it is argued that missed the social gains of the Celtic Tiger. Writing in the *Magill* magazine, Jack Copley notes that 'according to the SAHRU index, every electoral district in FSW remained in the "most deprived" category from 1991 to 2006' (Copley 2012). According to studies undertaken by Trutz Hasse into the social inequalities that existed in Finglas during Ireland's supposed finest hour of wealth that the percentage of low education in the Finglas South area dropped from 46.9% in 1996 to 39.8% in 2006 whereas on a national scale the figures dropped more dramatically from 29.2% in 1996 to 18.9% in 2006 (Hasse 2014: 35). Hasse goes on to state that:

the improvement in the educational attainment during Ireland's economic boom was spatially uneven and failed to reach into many disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Over the longer term this spatial pattern of educational attainment is likely to predicate similar spatial inequalities in the distribution of employment and unemployment. (Hasse 2014: 35)

What this shows is that during the most prosperous period in an economic sense in Ireland that some areas were left behind. The collection is as much a celebration of Finglas as it is Dublin and we are amply reminded of this throughout, especially from the opening of the book:

Everywhere we go, people always ask us, who are ya?  
Where deya come from? We're from Finglas, mighty mighty Finglas.  
(Hegarty 2017: i)

Unlike the work of Keegan there is very little attention given to the fallout after the Celtic Tiger in an immediate sense. Hegarty's approach is much more subtle and looks at the development of the Finglas landscape as being encroached by the Celtic Tiger as opposed to there being a sense of monetary excess in the area. While the naming of places is important within Hegarty's work, the use of Dublin dialect and intonation is also significant. Not only are we presented with descriptions of the place and its people but we are most importantly delivered with an exhibition of a Dubliners tongue. Even within the two lines quoted above there are two examples of this in 'who are ya', and 'deya'. Hegarty notes when speaking about the collection that 'in many ways *Flight Paths over Finglas* is a love poem to Finglas, and to all the different people who have flown in and out of my life' (Boyce 2017). There is a willingness on the poet's behalf to stretch the ordinariness of Dublin, and Finglas, into the magnificent. In a poem like 'Bareback Riding in Finglas South' this can be seen. In an act that in many parts of Dublin would be regarded as anti-social behaviour, the act of horse riding and keeping horses is still a significant cultural aspect of Finglas and many working-class estates in Ireland. Hegarty sees the poetic in the local environment but also its ability to offer a sense of escape from the mire of austerity and the remnants of the Celtic Tiger:

There is a knack  
When you go bareback,  
Riding a stolen pony  
To stop you feeling lonely. (Hegarty 2017: 41)

Once the animal is mounted then a moment of transcendence occurs. The natural world is what offers an escape from the loneliness and isolation of post-Celtic Tiger Finglas and the concrete environment. In the poem, there is a reference to Eve and an apple, a reference with obvious religious undertones such as in the Garden of Eden: 'Like Eve, you put the apple to his mouth' (Hegarty 2017: 41). Eve gave Adam an apple from the tree of knowledge of good and evil within the Garden of Eden and from this they gained additional knowledge. There is an interesting parallel between this story from the book of Genesis in the Bible and Hegarty's 'Bareback Riding in Finglas South'. Though there does not seem to be any religious significance within the poem itself the knowledge and transcendence that is gained is in locating the self, a knowledge of within. While Smith probes the cultural wealth of Dublin in 'Dublin You Are', Hegarty probes nature as a location through which to escape. Writing of Paula Meehan's poetry Eóin Flannery suggests that her attraction to the natural world can be seen as a reflection to the 'losses and the costs of development, and consequent ruination, of urban locations' (Flannery 2018, p.136) and the same can be said for Hegarty's writing. The trajectory of the horse and its rider within the poem converts council walls into hurdles and a rope guides the poet out of the ordinary and into the marvellous of the world around her:

The council wall becomes a mounting ledge.  
Like Eve, you put the apple to his mouth,  
With hemp for reins, you amble south. (Keegan 2017: 41).

The horse, symbolic of the natural world, has the ability to overcome the obstacle of development and once the individual is in tune with the natural world then an escape is possible. The key difference between Eve and the poet is that Hegarty can control the outcome of her journey and destiny within the poem through the reins, she is not guided by God or the snake as Eve is in Genesis. This journey, for Hegarty,

signals a move out of the ordinariness of her surroundings to one that elevates Finglas to a place above the mundane. It also points towards a need to engage more freely with the natural world in the post-Celtic Tiger era instead of returning to the Celtic Tiger mindset where 'growth, development, and progress [were] unquestioned values' (McGlynn 2017: 35):

By the riverbank, you dig heels into his flank –  
A nicker and you bolt out of the ordinary. (Hegarty 2017: 41)

Hegarty's poem 'Litha' also captures a seemingly ordinary experience and elevates it above its place. It locates the poet within the natural world of Finglas as opposed to urban concrete streets and housing developments. The poem recounts an evening walk the poet had with her partner on 'Midsummer's Eve'. The word Litha itself refers to the summer solstice, the day when the sun is highest in the sky. The day itself is a pagan celebration but also has a Christian basis because it is the Feast Day of Saint John the Baptist. The poem focuses more on Litha as the summer solstice and not its Christian form because of the sheer presence of nature within the poem. Nature itself offers an escape to both the poet and her partner in the poem, a way of returning to the youthful joy of wandering through fields in Dublin and as a way of escaping the technological advancements and sociological impact of the Celtic Tiger:

We wanna walk grass trails.  
I long for me wear  
In a rare Dublin field.  
Come here 'til I show you,  
Few know about this place. (Hegarty 2017: 73)

The rarity of a Dublin field in the poem points towards the loss of the rural landscape as a cost of urban development and cosmopolitanism. The author Kevin Barry has recently suggested that the city, and specifically Dublin, is no longer a place where the artist can maintain a living because the space is being taken over by corporate entities. He suggests that 'the relationship of the city to the artist is antagonistic. It wants rid of her; it will price her out; it will make clear that this

place, and these resources, are not for you. Fuck off – this is the essential message. The city now is for financiers, coders, Airbnb magnates; it is for tower and condo developers; it is for the independently wealthy; it is a machine designed for the bleeding of tourists; its economic and gentrifying forces work to repel artists as if designed by force of will to do so' (Barry 2019). Within 'Litha' Hegarty escapes from the corporate and material world of modern-day Dublin to the lesser known and rare places on the outskirts of the city. It is also interesting to note the poet's use of speech and dialect yet again to signify not only the place by naming it but also mythologizing the place through language such as in 'wanna', 'long for me wear', and 'like mad things' (Hegarty 2017: 73). The orality of the language breathes life into this strong Dublin poem. Nature and the natural world is not something that we have seen so far in the selected poems of Smith and Keegan but Hegarty's work in *Flight Paths over Finglas* is engrossed in nature from the picture of the raven on the cover page, also the symbol of Finglas, to the presence of 'a mound of grass, vetch, fern' within 'Litha' (Hegarty 2017: 73). Neil Astley suggests that 'ecopoems dramatize the dangers and poverty of a modern world perilously cut off from nature and ruled by technology, self-interest and economic power' (Astley 2007: 15). In 'Bealtaine', dedicated to Paula Meehan who also lived in Finglas, Hegarty uses the dichotomy between the natural world and the technological in order to show that the natural world offers solace and a sense of escape within the city. The horse that breaks 'loose on the Finglas Road' (Hegarty 2017: 71) is again fed apples and 'leaps/Townsend's wall/and gallops/off down the tarmac' (Hegarty 2017: 71). Here the natural world transgresses the world of development and modern society just as in 'Bareback Riding in Finglas South'. While Hegarty appreciates the moment within the poem there is a sense of fear that permeates the end of 'Bealtaine'. The modern era and technology have power over her son as he fails to witness the beauty of the horse being set free as he watches horse videos on 'Youtube/iPhone – gazing' (Hegarty 2017: 72). The final lines of 'Baltaine' can be connected with 'Litha':

I need him

To witness her go. (Hegarty 2017: 72)

This line has a duality of meaning to it; it relates to the freedom of the horse running on the road and the beauty of nature overcoming the concrete world, and is also symbolic of the loss of the natural world to economic and technological developments during and after the Celtic Tiger. Similarly, in a broader sense the presence of the natural world in 'Litha' offers a route backwards into the past through the 'local ring fort' and freedom from the present state of the developed landscape and housing developments:

I guide you to the remnants  
of our local ring fort –  
a mound of grass, vetch, fern,  
sticky-backs and closed buttercups.  
Oak trees silhouetted in streetlight (Hegarty 2017: 73)

Hegarty's rootedness to the ecological in this poem offers her a pathway to youthful experiences but also suggests a desire to keep the natural spaces of her local area alive even if only in a literary and imaginative sense. However, the imbrication of the natural world and that of economic development seems to be slowly fusing together through the 'Oak trees silhouetted in streetlight' (Hegarty 2017: 73) with Elizabeth-Jane Burnett commenting upon eco-poetry that 'the task of (eco)poetry is a task of survival in many senses' (Burnett 2017: 194). Being immersed in nature with her partner enables Hegarty to be freed and lifted from the pressures of modern life and of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland: 'You lift me up, skyward,/spin me and make me dizzy' (Hegarty 2017: 73) and just as the horse offered transcendence in 'Bareback Riding in Finglas South' so too does the natural landscape she visits in 'Litha'. The ultimate symbol of corporatism and marketing, the mobile phone, is what drags the poet back to the realities and responsibilities of life and modernity:

The phone pings us back  
To real time in Raheny.  
Our babysitter's on the clock  
And tomorrow there's school. (Hegarty 2017: 73)

There is a duality at play within the structure and architecture of the poem where the first three stanzas are embedded in the past of paganism, old ring forts, natural ground and youthful experience while the final two stanzas signal the return to the present of mobile phones and babysitters. Both the past and the present fuse together here as does the sense of the natural world and the economic. Andrew Kincaid comments that 'rapidly transforming, globalizing cities lend themselves to reflection upon what is being lost and how identities are being reshaped' (Kincaid 2005: 28) and this is precisely what Hegarty is exploring within the poem. Offering a reshaping of Irish identity in the post-Celtic Tiger era, she presents a new identity that is rooted in the ordinariness and transcendental beauty of the natural world instead of one that is rooted in the monetization of that world. Gerry Smyth has noted that 'the cornerstone of any new definition of Irish identity must be the development of a new moral vision' (Smyth 2012: 136). The new moral vision that Hegarty expounds is one that is not rooted in the Celtic Tiger mindset of excess, development and economic growth but one that sees the natural world as the true source of fulfilment. In the poem there is a juxtaposition between the freedom of the natural world and the restricted nature of the lives we live in the city: 'A late gloaming, we check/the windows and lock doors' (Hegarty 2017: 73). The freedom of walking the Dublin field at the beginning of the poem is in stark contrast to the element of imprisonment signalled by the locking of the doors and windows. 'Litha' is a poem about engaging with the natural space that the city offers, the moments of connectedness to both a partner and the ecological world, and also a critique of the stagnation and isolation of the modern city. In Dublin after the downfall of the Celtic Tiger, for Hegarty, it seems that a turn towards the natural world will sustain against the bombardment of austerity, debt and the encroachment of development for monetary gain alone.

### **Competing Interests**

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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