

city of dreamers and woodlice

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simon james brady

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Simon James Brady

First published in 2026 by
Five Bar Gate Press, Dublin
fivebargate.ie

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Cover photograph by N

ISBN 978-1-0668031-3-2

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Green Man

I have seen your footsteps
cradled in ancient forests.

Your eyes are dark chlorophyll vacuums
teaching the difference between

the quietness of an autumn leaf
and the silence after a chainsaw.

We have much to learn
about different kinds of death.

A Grebe's Prayer

I moved gently over the water
with the grebes, diving and dancing
in the season of creation -
this waterweed they offer each other

is more than knowledge or cunning,
love itself becomes encapsulated
in a few wet leaves.

Linguicide

in the Arctic
a blue whale is turning
in the ancient Arctic
a blue whale is turning

in my car in my sitting room in my cubicle
I am seated
I am seated but not present
the man on the tv

is talking with my voice
the man on the tv
is talking
about toothpaste and celebrities

overhead an Arctic tern
weaves invisible messages
in an almost forgotten language
moving from pole to pole

and a blue whale
is turning
singing a lattice of hollow songs
into the cold and ancient sea

unGaia

there was never any
thin blanket of gases
to protect what you know and love
from the ravages of the solar wind

there were never any bacteria
swarming over billions of years
so that they could evolve
into your friends and family

there were no forests
no rivers, no Arctic terns
wheeling from pole to pole
no dinosaurs or trilobites

no *Homo habilis* clacking
rocks into tools
no butterflies, no Elvis
no eyes watching Orion

no green and blue marble
sweeping around the Milky Way
just some lifeless rocks
orbiting a yellow star

there was never any us

Song in the Many Voices of Gaia

Here we are.

Heed us.

Free us from the tyranny of unthinking.

Smell us, touch us, hear us, love us.

Be with us in the day and the night.

Fear us. Eat us. Use us. Relate to us.

Don't forget us in the cooking and the boiling.

Thank us in the eating and the drinking.

Grow with us blue and green

in the void of space, spinning around our sun.

Rain with us, gust with us.

Be yourself with us and let us be.

Thank the uncreated love for loving us

for creating us, for expressing us.

Speak with us, speak for us.

Be wild with us.

Be human as we are not human.

Stand by us in the dark days ahead

against those of your kind

who would forget us and abuse us.

Be powerful in yourselves for us, for you.

we sleep eat mate grow die

just like you

as you

as everything

and in the dreaming
sing to us as we are singing back.
Share our music
and become whole.

River Walk, Avondale

It is ourselves we are scared of
nervous that our lives might expand beyond
some small area of control
that we might understand the significance

of the gurgles of the river
moving to the ocean
murmuring of wasted sunsets and sunrises
whilst we skim in small eddies between rocks

moving like pondskaters
in stabilities that are only provisional
not wanting to admit
that death takes care of everything.

.....

The river is dreaming about the ocean.
The dragonfly is dreaming about the river
and the trees

are dreaming about the coming of winter.
The river and the trees
conspire in silence

rejoicing in the sun
and the sun is dreaming
about its darker sister

and night rumbles gently in its sleep.

Water Dog

clear-eyed out of water
graceful under water
swift and precise
in the search for life

on the bank, in the river
in the river, of the shore
between
balanced

furry master of the extremes
teach us
to know when to breathe and when to hold
to live mindfully
in our own intersections

.....

between the muddy banks of the river
the otter plays
moving between worlds
and I heard him repeat silently

his words of advice
become more than human
so that you may become
truly human

and so I became
the noise of a bee buzzing in a blossom
fat-bodied and dusted with pollen
I tasted the wind

as a pair of seagull's wings
tossed by currents
that I could not verbalise
some barrier within me

had been dissolved
and the croziers of ferns
unfurled
in a dark place in my soul

The World Is Empty, the World Is Full

A small house — four walls
and a sunny room,
the sound of cars on roads
somewhere in the distance.

I can hear Ann washing
down past the corridor
and our little cat sits
staring unblinkingly into a corner

waiting for a wandering woodlouse perhaps,
or a reluctant beetle
to meander from under the skirting board.
Her attitude is a catalyst

for my own — expectant, watchful
and full of respect
for the mystery of what happens,
from the slow movements

of a great mountain over eons,
to the minute scuttlings
of an insect's claws.
It all fits, it all fulfils

the promise of a single day,
uncomplicated like a distant God
who wanders unexpectedly into your midst
bringing messages of simplicity:

this table, this chair
this singing life,
a gentle movement through the elements
blessing the earth and the sky.

Casualty

it was early
on the way to work
a little up from Goatstown cross

I saw him lying
in a pool of scarlet blood -
a big dog fox

his eyes were half-turned in
and his teeth were fixed
in a permanent deathly grin

I thought of how dark
it must have been
when he made his final attempt

to cross the road
how the body freezes
in the sudden dazzle

of headlights
and how the eyes flash
before the thud

An Ode to Car Parks

Very few notice that
where they park their car
is also a little piece of planet,

that it too whirls around the sun
alongside the great names in landscape -
the Grand Canyon, the Amazon or

the Taj Mahal.
It is the small ugly man
at the cocktail party

shuffling about in a bad tarmac suit
sprouting weeds from his shoes
being ignored by

the geographic hoi polloi.
Perhaps car parks yearn
for somebody to stop

as they open their car door
and stand there
staring at the stars,

to acknowledge that car park
car and car owner
share the same dark path

as all the wonders of the world
hurtling silently
through the Milky Way.

Confluence

oceans gather where
ancient turtles lay eggs
at the edge of time

I run my fingers through the soil
beneath an oak tree
and visualise
mycological veins and roots

coiling for miles all around me
glowing with an amber fire

oceans gather where
arctic terns sleep on the wing
between realities

I examine my iris
in a mirror
I see flecks of
blue and white

like the surf on an ocean
seen from an aeroplane

oceans merge where
humpback whales sing
into the echo chambers of the Milky Way

The Channel

"Magic, as the shaman practices it, is a matter of communication with the forces of nature as if they were mindful, intentional presences..."

— Theodore Roszak

i

at the precipice of the spoken word
I heard the song of an ancient shaman
with his tricks and mirrors
his ventriloquism gave voices

to the voiceless
so that others could hear —
he was a channel and not a source
contradictory in his authenticity

he sang into the silence
of trees and branches
of light entering words, words entering voices
his people are now everywhere

dying like leaves, voiceless as autumn
they need his voice as an anchor
the way weeds grow
through stones in the riverbed

ii

at the edge
there are no words
light trickles through
like water seeping

into the roots of a forest
everything is green and alive
aware to its core
unintelligible, dazzling

like the voice of the distant sun
calling through the trees at dawn
a voice broken up by branches
made whole in the life of decaying leaves

Altair, Vega, Clonskeagh¹

almost midnight, the familiar walk
the elderly shih-tzu must empty her bladder
before retiring to bed

and under the dark oak tree
where we make our turn for home
I look up, a clear night in summer

the same two stars always above
at this point, forming
a great triangle

stretching light years beyond Clonskeagh
with Kirsty and me at its vertex
depths of time and distance

boundless in their infinity
and yet they end in this human hand
clutching the lead of a snuffling dog

¹Altair (in Aquila) and Vega (in Lyra) are two of the three bright stars forming the Summer Triangle, one of the most recognisable star patterns in the Northern Hemisphere's summer sky.

Interglacial

between two icy sleeps
the earth dreamed alive
this naked ape

that was to become
the eyes of Gaia
staring back

from space probes
and seeing everything
all at once

all so fragile
all so alive
and so blue

and white
and green
against the darkness

that envelops
everything
even the mother sun

Dot

"It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world."

— Carl Sagan

the aggregate of our joy and suffering
lost in deep time

spinning in the anonymity
of enclosing spiral arms

greener than a lost childhood
bluer than the dreams of an ancient ocean

where microscopic gentry
passed on their fortune -

oxygen, sugar and a thirst
for complexity

how can I not be grateful
when all this was given freely

to an unknown future
and the eyes of a naked ape?

Restitution

you own nothing
you can own nothing
ownership is merely a delusion
caused by the fear of death

everything is borrowed
borrowed from the earth
or borrowed from future generations
or borrowed

from the nurturing
cosmic ground of everything
that gives freely
so that all can live

and in death we give back
the minerals and dreams
that have animated our bones
so that others after us

human and non-human
can also own nothing
and live fully
in the circling of carbon and light

The Immeasurable Heavens¹

the blue damselflies
of Eastwall Business Park
are not particularly capitalist
and their little pond

in the midst of corporate offices
does not shrink back
or feel ashamed
for not contributing to GDP

and on this sunny
lunch break
I am not ashamed
to be just another animal

enjoying the heat
of our local star
the damselflies, me
and a half dozen

other humans
feeding tidbits to the feral cats
all are citizens of Laniakea
beautiful and utterly small

¹Laniakea: Hawaiian, 'immeasurable heaven.' The supercluster of galaxies that contains our Milky Way, named in 2014. Spanning 520 million light-years and holding approximately 100,000 galaxies, it is the largest named structure in the universe — the biggest address any of us will ever have.

The Cormorant

Crucifix still in the Clontarf sun
the cormorant with
his wings outstretched

and again at Ferrycarrig
where the Slaney swells
slopping tidal waters

against muddy banks.
I watched the cormorant
perched on a stick

mid-flow
stretching his wings
towards the sun

until suddenly
where wave meets air
he slipped between

all fantailed and kicking legs
a feathered harpoon
disappearing and reappearing.

Nasturtiums

In the garden
the nasturtiums
are crowded
with cataphatic bees,

all a buzz
about the last
remnants of summer,
diligently

they gather
and gather
the pollen
but the nasturtiums

are silent
offering only
their flowers
and nothing

else -
some truths
are deeper
than truth

that is spoken,
like a noisy bee
in a silent
flower.

The Brent Geese on Alfie Byrne Road

the brent geese
on Alfie Byrne Road
rise up
over the morning traffic

the brent geese
on Alfie Byrne Road
have returned from
Axel Heiberg Island

and this is enough
and this
all this
is enough

the brent geese
on Alfie Byrne Road
rise up
over the morning traffic

Renaming Dublin

I would rename this city
away from its human name.
Instead I would place it
back into the island landscape
from which it emerges.

No longer would the black pool
be only a human description.
I would rename Dublin
“the black pool on the river mouth
in the flatness of a muddy estuary,

the city of foxes and magpies,
city of brent geese wintering,
city sweeping down
from Kippure to Bray Head,
all the way around the bay

past grey seals to Howth,
city of clashing antlers
and fawns hiding
in the long grass
near Áras an Uachtaráin,

city of pigeons in beech trees,
city of rookeries,
city of bluetits and goldfinches
on bird feeders in small gardens,
city of screaming vixens

as the oystercatchers
pipe across the dark sky
of UCD football pitches,
city of ten thousand rats,
city of house spiders,

watershed of small rivers,
Dodder, Tolka, Poddle, Slang,
city of dreamers and woodlice,
city of whales moving slowly
up and down the Irish Sea”

Acknowledgements

Sixteen of these poems first appeared in *Winterkeen* (Five Bar Gate Press, 2026), and are gathered here in a new selection.

The Cormorant, Nasturtiums, The Brent Geese on Alfie Byrne Road, unGaia and *Renaming Dublin* are published here for the first time.

Simon James Brady grew up in County Cavan and lives and works in Dublin. *Winterkeen* is his first collection.

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