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# Bray Arts Journal

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*Alpine Winter Scene - by Padruig MacFarlane-Barrow*

## Giuseppe di Stefano, Italian tenor, July 24 1921 - March 3 2008

by Gerard Thomas

The death took place of Giuseppe Di Stefano on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008. For anyone brought up on Opera during the 1950's and 60's, he was one of the greatest stars. His career began in 1946 with his debut as Rudolfo in La Boheme, in one of Italy's many provincial opera houses. As luck would have it, his growth in the world of opera coincided with two



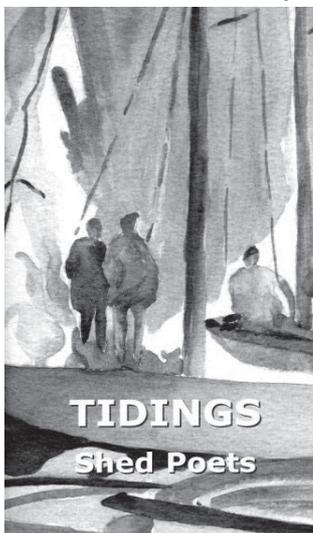
other great artists who were to have a profound influence on his career, Maria Callas and Tito Gobbi. These three artists dominated the Teatro ala Scala, Milan from 1952 until the advent of the 60's. They also dominated the world of recorded music. In 1953 they recorded Puccini's Tosca. Although a

mono recording, Columbia Records have been unable to withdraw it from their catalogue. It was rated as the finest recording of opera of all time. It is enjoying a new lease as a double CD.

I had the greatest pleasure of seeing the great man on the stage of the Gaity as Cavaradossi in 1963. At the time he was paid the highest then or since. He earned £22,000 for three performances. Besides the complete recordings there are several recital discs, all of which are very exciting. He was a worthy sucessor to my other great icon, Benjaminso Gigli. Long may he be remembered.

## Tidings from the Shed Poets

The Shed Poets Society have launched their third group collection of poetry: **Tidings**.



This is another very impressive collection from six poets: Rosy Wilson, Maureen Perkins, Carol Boland, Bernie Kenny, Judy Russell and Marguerite Colgan. Space does not permit a full review in this issue of the Journal but it will be reviewed in greater depth in the June issue. At a modest price of 7 Euro this collection, of sustained excellence, is highly recommended. Bray Arts will be inviting the Shed Poets to read this coming Autumn.

## Congratulations

The indefatigable Carmen Cullen has just completed an M. Phil. in Creative Writing in The Oscar Wilde Center, School of English, Trinity College. She is one of sixteen students completing the course this year and some of their end of year work has been published in **Sixteen After Ten** which was launched by the Pulitzer prize winning author **Richard Ford** in the magnificent Long Room of the Old Library in Trinity College. Carmen is currently completeing a Novel (another one). What next?



## Memories of John McGahern by Oliver Marshall

I first met John McGahern on a writer's course in 1989. The course was one in a series of National Writing Workshops organised by the Arts Council and University College Galway. The course consisted of three weekends in University College Galway in the Spring of 1989. At Easter, we spent a week in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annaghmakerrig. There were about twelve participants on the course. John McGahern was the moderator. I couldn't believe it when my application to go on the course was successful.

John McGahern came to prominence with the publication of his first novel *The Barracks* in 1963. His second novel *The Dark*, published in 1965, brought him into conflict with the Church, and cost him his job as a national school teacher. The details of that controversy are well known. There is no need to repeat them here.

Despite leaving long gaps between novels, McGahern was quite a prolific writer and a constant presence in Irish writing for forty years. The afternoon he died, the RTE programme *Liveline* was deluged with tributes. One caller to the programme said that he showed courage in his own life, and kindness in the lives of others.

He wrote six novels, and three volumes of short stories (including a *Collected Stories*), concluding with *Memoir*, an autobiographical look at his childhood. His work was his life and his life was his work. Much of his work is autobiographical in inspiration, but in his best work, he moves beyond autobiography into a kind of poetry of the self where the rhythm and vision are uniquely his own. The pain of his early childhood, caused by the loss of his mother, and the difficult relationship with his father, seems to have stayed with him all his life. Writing was his way of dealing with this pain.

In *The Leavetaking*, the central character describes the story of his life as memory becoming imagination. I think that is a good description of all McGahern's work: memory becoming imagination. Sometimes this aesthetic works and sometimes it is less certain. The opening sentence of *The Leavetaking* reads: "I watch a gull's shadow float among feet on the concrete

*as I walk in a day of my life with a bell, its brass tongue in my hand and think after all that the first constant was water."*

To me, this style does not always work. The poetry in the writing exceeds the given facts of the story more than it illuminates them. At other times the writing is completely assured, as in this passage from his early story *Wheels* :

*"Quietly the dark came, the last tasks hurried, a shift of hens on the roost of the hen-house before the bolting of the door; and inside the lamp was lit..."*

The quiet poetry and contained passion of the writing really illuminate the poignant story which the writer is describing.

On the course, he was a very good teacher, talking or staying quiet as required. Personally, I found him very encour-



aging. His theme was writing and the search for the right expression. He had a number of key ideas, which he returned to again and again. Self-expression was no expression. Writing was the hardest thing we could ever do. It made everything else more pleasurable.

He talked a lot about Chekhov and how he had turned to French writers for inspiration, because of their Catholic base. He said he had made his biggest mistakes as a writer when he had stuck too closely to the facts, to the way things were.

His views on Irish writers were somewhat idiosyncratic. He thought that reading Richard Ellmann's biography of James Joyce was like "reading 100,000 newspapers." He thought Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain were a "disaster."

None of us really questioned him on these views. Frank O'Connor, in particular, was a fine short story writer and an intelligent critic. It is difficult to know why McGahern thought he was a "disaster." He had a lot of strong views, and he did not always encourage debate. I quoted him a remark which I had heard Edna O'Brien, in a lecture, attribute approvingly to Samuel Beckett: "The artist has no brothers and lives nowhere." McGahern would have none of it. He rejected the remark immediately. "The artist has many brothers and lives everywhere," he said. He was a very down-to-earth person. He did not believe in the artist

as a recluse. All McGahern's characters face their difficulties, one way or the other, usually with courage and a kind of inner poetry of the mind which is constant. As he said to us on the course, in a phrase I have never forgotten, "you have to live with your own personality, one way or the other." His characters struggle with themselves and with the people around them and this perhaps is a reflection of McGahern's own struggle with himself as a writer.

Throughout his life, John McGahern cultivated a low profile, yet his public impact was considerable. His style of writing, and the voice in which he presented it, were unmistakable.

As a person he was very good company. The word that comes to mind is constant. He was always the same, always in good humour, always interested in what was going on around him. On the course, he mixed with us socially. One of my happiest memories is that I drank a pint of Guinness with him.

His public comments on writing go hand in hand with the private search for self that motivates his work. When he said that he thought everything interesting begins with one person in one place, he is really talking about himself. He was that one person in that one place, a writer in a room, trying to make sense of his life and, in particular, the past that shaped him.

His characters never really escape the past. In *The Dark* the central character struggles to get away from the oppressive father. Yet the last scene shows the father and son back in the one bed together. In the story *Wheels* the narrator goes home to meet his father. He sees his life as a story going nowhere. He sees his father as a person who started his "journey to nowhere." The story consists of a series of small interconnected stories, each one of which seems to go nowhere. The only release from this painfully constricted world is through memory and imagination. On the train back to Dublin, the narrator thinks longingly of his childhood:

*Sing for them once First Communion Day O river Shannon flowing and a four-leaved shamrock growing silver medal on the blue suit and white ankle socks in new shoes.*

The happiness of a remembered past is the only way out of a difficult present. McGahern's characters go back to the past, because however painful, it is also the source of imagination and of freedom. McGahern found this freedom in his own life by writing. He told me that whenever he passed a school, he thanked his lucky stars that he was no longer a teacher.

Joyce and Beckett rejected the past, continually trying to find a fictionalised way of keeping it distant. McGahern continually embraces the past, because it is what he knows. He believed that we can only love what we know.

I remember him with affection. He was completely true to himself and the world he knew, and no writer can do much more. As Joseph O'Connor observed recently, there will never be another John McGahern.

**KERELA**

by Debashis Sen

An isle of green beauty, where time does not wear  
our  
serenity flowering in trees; shadows the canopy of  
easy  
walkers who dot green as a sweet intrusion into  
eternity.

In afternoon glints seas converge before a foretold  
dusk  
falls unvaried across horizon lines. In a crowded  
bazaar shaded alleys hold ancient myth in suspense  
as if a sea of curiosity, beyond distant folds of sleep.

Honking horns fade like old brooding temples, where  
gnarled twisted roots snake up to kiss the burning  
incense  
of primeval mosses – invisible signatures laid to  
bear.  
Honestly erased like a day's harshness put to rest.

**Hummingbird**

by Shirley Farrar

High on thin air,  
sapphire flash  
gemstone hangs

on mountain slopes,  
iridescent blue  
nectar alcoholic-

*black throated mango*  
spikes a seductive drink  
in ultra violet light,

tonguing orange trumpets  
dervish whirler pirouettes  
frantic rainforest dance

humming sweet nothings,  
high altitude thrash  
breakneck speed-chasing

helicopter antics,  
puncture a flower's heart-  
tropical cocktail delight.



**If I Were a Poet**

by Berni Alexander

If I were a poet, I'd know it,  
'Cos the lines that I'd write wouldn't rhyme.  
I'd be constantly fired up with passion  
And look distant and sad all the time.

I'm aware that I don't have a talent,  
For themes that are vague or obscure.  
And the way I express what's within me  
Somehow lacks enigmatic allure.

So, I've accessed my torture and anguish,  
With a view to acquiring some cred.  
And I'm trading in rhyming and meter,

To write real poems like this one instead.

Am I less or more in the chalice of your hand?  
Does the hilt of life's sword rise and fall as you sleep?  
My coat of steel, my craven heart, Aye the Hebrides  
Nay, a Lark, a Lark.

**To The Letter**

by Berni Alexander

I'm sitting in the summer breeze,  
Fingers poised above my keys  
Trying to write a poem that's neat  
Very short and incomplete.

But words afraid to pass my lips  
Are queueing in my finger tips,  
Imploring me to vent my rage  
And liberate them on the page.

I think they have an epic planned,  
So I've dismissed them out of hand,  
Epics are no good to me  
On nights when brevity is key.

They'll have to swallow discontent,  
I decide upon the length,  
So sorry boys, I hold the keys  
To end this when and where I...

**Poem**

by Mervyn Peake

The paper is breathless  
Under the hand  
And the pencil is poised  
Like a warlock's wand

## RESCUE

by Hugh Rafferty

He sat alone in the dark, inside the box, within the hushed emptiness of the building. He tried to pray but he could not. His thoughts strayed and even with his eyes tight shut he could find no focus or any conscious means of stilling the fears that crowded him with almost physical mass, making him feel nauseous, sour bellied like the time he had gorged on crab apples. He could smell smoke now, bitter and waxy, and in his mind's eye he could picture flames guttering in the half-light. And he could smell dust and old wood and the mingled scents of people come and gone. How long had he been here? Time dragged but it did pass by. Perhaps an hour, perhaps less, he couldn't tell. Years ago time had flown by. Years ago he had been busy, time only to do, not to think. But now? Now he had no idea, no certainty, and he felt no centre to his life.



He heard footsteps, sharp and fast. Someone stopped close by and he heard the rustle of clothes and the creak of the wooden bench. Aggie Connolly. He would have known it was her even without the waft of her lavender scent. Prim and proper and soft spoken Aggie Connolly, who carried a bitterness born of loneliness, that she spent in unkind words and mean spirited actions. *I was spiteful, Father*, she would say, *I was backbiting* ...like she always said and he would forgive her as he always did on her promise of amendment. And she would be back next week. And the others would come in their usual order ... Biddy Flynn, *jealousy* ... Matty Farrell, *impure thoughts* ... and the rest of them, until his regulars had washed their souls clean. They would not make a decent sinner between them, he thought.

And what about him? A man who could sit for two hours every Saturday and channel divine forgiveness and at the same time not be sure that he believed. A man who preached so eloquently from the altar and yet had qualms himself about the truth. What sort of sinner did he make? *A sad one*, he thought.

It had not always been like this. He had set out on his ministry full of faith and unafraid. Ready to carry the good news to all, wanting only to serve and save his fellows. And it had been hard but also wonderful and even in the bleakest times he had the warmth of his belief. For years he had toiled happily but then the world had turned and everything had changed utterly. His relevance to people, his role in society, the very structures that he had thought immutable had passed away. It was as if he had somehow arrived in a strange land where he was patently needed but no longer wanted. He still had a faithful congregation to serve but its numbers had declined over time as even the staunchest members reeled and wilted as the awful record of scandal and corruption in their diocese came to light. He had felt each disclosure as a body blow that had weakened and cheapened his role. Yet somehow, he had clung to the essential goodness and rightness of his calling and he continued to care for the welfare of his depleted flock.

But on Saturdays in the dark box when his control slipped and his thoughts ran rampant, he was prey to doubts.

The door on the left side opened and Aggie entered. *Bless me father ... I was spiteful*. And when she finished the others in their turn came and went.

*It must be nearly time*, he thought. He checked his watch and the luminous hands said he had half an hour to go. He wanted to leave, to get away from the dark, but he would not. He squirmed in his chair to ease his cramped posture and again his thoughts began to wander but he was disturbed by the loud tread of footsteps on the marble floor. A person, a man, strode directly to the box and stepped in on the right. He looked through the mesh screen but he could not quite make out who it was.

'Bless me father,' the man started.

*I know that voice*, he thought, but no face came to mind.

'It's five years since my last confession.'

*It's Edmund Burke*. He was fairly sure although he had not spoken to him for a while.

'I coveted my brother's wife.'

*Not Edmund*, he thought. *No. Too soft. It's the brother ... what d'ye call him? Louis? Yes Louis Burke, by no means a regular, a drop out you might call him, yet here he was*. He could feel the quickening of his spirit as he responded.

'What precisely do you mean by 'covet'?

'You know, father, 'the ninth commandment. I ... I want her. I wish she were mine. I want to have her as a woman. Oh, God help me father, she's all I can think about.' The man was plainly upset and he spoke rapidly blurting out his pain in harsh whispers.

The Burke brothers must be well in their forties, he reckoned. He could not remember when the older one got married but it might be ten years ago.

'Tell me,' he asked gently, 'does the lady reciprocate your feelings?'

'What? God! No.' Louis said loudly and his voice dropped to a whisper again as he continued. 'Never. She would never do something like that.'

'And do you think she loves your brother?'

'Yes.'

'And your brother. Does he love her? Is he kind to her?'

'Yes,' he whispered fiercely. 'Yes, yes, yes. That's why it's so awful. Oh, God what will I do? I'll have to leave the house.'

'Do they know how you feel?'

## Review of April Arts Evening

Monday April 7 2008 opened with a day of cold rain hail and thunder.

I arrived into the Bray Arts meeting room on a cold, Spring evening to find a welcoming fire making the room cosy and warm. The early arrival of the capacity audience created a keen anticipation of the coming evening. There was a lively buzz of chatter and greeting mixed with rippling sounds of rasqueados warming up under the flying hands of Garcia and his students promising a thrilling evening.

Our chairperson Zan welcomed everyone with apologies for the late arrival of the Racker who was delayed in arriving from London by snows in Heathrow airport.

The meeting opened with a most impressive photographic display that caught the attention of the capacity audience. Malcolm McGettigan presented a photographic study of the abandoned Player Wills Factory in Dublin's South Circular Road. A lively discussion developed that highlighted the creativity of the photographer in illustrating some unusual views that changed the mundane offices and workshops into dramatic scenarios of light and shade. I was left with a deep impression of the echoes evoked by this place which was such a landmark institution in Dublin's inner city.

The photo presentation was followed by a powerful monologue written by Iris Park and directed by Frank O'Keeffe.

Sensitively delivered by Justin Aylmer, this was a presentation of the musings of a successful business man who, at the height of his career, is patronising towards his wife and charitable activities. The onset of ME caused a dramatic change and a reversal of roles between him and his wife. His wife becomes the breadwinner and soon adopts all the aggressive tendencies and scepticism of her husband in former times. Justin gave a splendid performance expressing the loneliness, fears and the dreams of an individual who has reached his senior years and has little more to look forward to in life. The audience gave this performance their fullest support.



Justin Aylmer

After the interval the Racker burst into the room with flamboyant flashes of verbal dancing in his usual manner. His witty words wafted the audience into warm expectations of the musical event to follow. Presented by Bray's outstanding Flamenco Guitarist, the night unfurled in the manner of the bullfight as Garcia's students progressively introduced the audience to more and more complex music on the Flamenco Guitar, culminating in the presentation by the master himself. The program began with Adrian who hails from Aughamore in Co. Mayo and is said to be a musician to watch. Adrian chose a challenging piece that displayed all the colour and energy

'Never. I wouldn't hurt them like that. Not for anything.'

'But you do hurt them, in your mind, don't you? When you feed your desire, when you covet her, you demean her in your mind and in your mind you sin against your brother.'

'Oh!' Louis said, very quietly. The priest let the silence stretch between them until Louis continued. 'I never thought of it like that.'

'Well do think on it, you may find it will help you. Because you know in your heart that this infatuation must end, don't you?'

'Yes.' There was pain in the soft voice and the catch of suppressed emotion. 'Yes, father, I do.'

They talked on for a time about loneliness and temptation. Then with penance and absolution he released a happier Louis from the box; a Louis easier in his mind and lighter in his spirit.

He sat on. *Louis should get married*, he thought. *It's not good for the man to be alone*. He permitted himself a wry smile. *I should know*.

His watch said he was five minutes over time so he closed his eyes and finished with a prayer. He realised that he felt much restored as he made his prayer with a simple faith in the goodness of God. It was always like this on the occasions when he could reach out and help a soul in trouble and it sustained him through the bad times.

He left the darkness of the box for another week.

END.

## Video Voyeur

Harold Chassen

**Flyboys** is the story of the adventures of the Lafayette Escadrille, young Americans who volunteered for the French air corps before the US entered World War I, and became the country's first fighter pilots. This is a bit short on plot and the critics complained all the characters were stereotypes, which is somewhat true. Yet I quite enjoyed it, not for the story, but because of the flying and aerial combat sequences. To me it is as close to flying as I'd like to come. Not since *The Blue Max*, filmed in Ireland has there been a film

that covered flying in the first-world war.



of this invigorating music. Next we heard from Daniel Byrne who brought us deeper into the flying sounds and vibrations of this unique form. This lyrical piece highlighted the romance of the music of Spain and was warmly applauded by all. Next Juan "Er Picao" sparkled into life as he introduced his piece of "solea". It was immediately clear that we were in the presence of a budding genius. His hands were everywhere on the guitar. We relaxed into the fluent tremolo and rasqueado sustained throughout this impressive work. The audience found themselves sitting on the



Garcia

Garcia and his colleagues were building up. The audience listened spellbound as they were transported out of Bray and into the fantasy world of Garcia's music.

Tremendous applause followed as Garcia came to a stop. The crowd wanted more and that is how it should be. Inspired by the magnificence of the musical extravaganza the Racker leapt to the stage and drew the audience into verbal rasqueados as he played on rhyming couplets and words of many meanings. He drew us into the world of Joyce and Synge; reminding us of the Player Wills Factory and the emotions of middle class Dublin of long ago as he entertained the audience with brilliant words and poetry on the theme of the Dalkey Gold Rush. In this presentation the Racker gave honour to the triumphant performance of Garcia and his fellow musician's and to all the performers of the night's entertainment.

Sated and happy, the audience melted away, still excited, with ears ringing.

Cearbhall E. O'Meadhra

## Preview of Arts Evening on May 12th

Venue : Heather House Hotel, Strand Road (Seafront).  
Doors open 8:00pm. Programme starting strictly at 8:30 pm  
All are Welcome. Admission E5 / E4 conc.

Bray Arts has a terrific line-up for the 12th May.

**Derek Pullen** will direct a one act play, *Crossing The Bar* by Don Nigro. This play won an award for best comedy in the 2008 Bray One-Act Festival. The cast members are, Ro-

sary Morley, Cyrena Hayes-Byrne and Martin Davidson.

**Padruig McFarlane Barrow** Artist, Architect, Musician and Writer will read from his memoirs *Life Is For Living*. The reading will be accompanied by a montage of photographs and Padruig's paintings.

**Jimi Cullen** is a solo musician from Gorey, a small town in the South East of Ireland, a town full of the same small mindedness that has been the inspiration for many of his songs like "Change your Life" and "Small minded people living in small towns".

"When the last leaf falls" CD was released in March 07'. Jimi's music can best be described as a mix between Folk, Grunge, Blues and Rock mixed with a healthy dose of originality. His lyrics are often quite politically and socially aware with songs about War, Poverty, Injustice and the Homeless, but often humorous too with songs like "Hangover Blues" and "Talking Religion Blues" and of course some songs are simply of love won and lost. We are delighted to welcome this exciting artist to our Bray Arts Evening.

## Bray Jazz Festival

### Friday, 2nd May

Town Hall	6.30	Liu Fang (China)	E12
Mermaid	8.00	Mare Nostrum (Sweden/France/Italy)	E25
Jazz Club			
@Royal	9.00	Dafnis Prieto Sextet	E20
World Music Stage	10.30	Carmen Suza Band (Cape Verdi)	E12

### Saturday, 3rd May

Jazz Club	2.30pm	Touche (Denmark)	Free
Town Hall	6.30	Norma Winstone & Tommy Halferty (Irl/Eng)	E12
Mermaid	8:00	Maceo Parker & his band with D. Rollins (standing)	E30
Jazz Club	9.00	Togetherness	E15
World Music Stage	10.00	Havana Son avec David L'Esprit (Irl/Cuba/Fr)	E12
Late Night	12.00	Miles Davis Electric Tribute	E12

### Sunday, 4th May

Jazz Club @ Royal	2.30pm	Touche (Denmark)	Free
Town Hall	6.30	Zahr (Italy/Ireland)	E12
Mermaid	8:00	Orchestra National de Jazz (France)	E25
Jazz Club	9.00	Cormac Kenevey & Phil Ware Trio (Irl/UK)	E15
World Music Stage	10.30	Ibrahim Electric (Denmark)	E12
Late Night	12.00	Yurodny (Irl)	E12

Plus lots of free music sessions all over Bray. All details available on website [www.brayjazz.com](http://www.brayjazz.com) or on links page of [www.brayarts.net](http://www.brayarts.net).

## P.S.

Bray Arts will hold its AGM at the June Arts Evening and once again we are asking for volunteers to assist in the running of Bray Arts, which may entail joining the committee or simply volunteering to collect admission at the door for one or a few evenings during the year or helping to lay out the room occasionally.

Bray Arts is run totally on a voluntary basis and, if it is to survive, it must always have an inflow of new volunteers who will contribute fresh ideas and energy. Without this it will inevitably flounder because the willing volunteers who have sustained it for years will simply get tired and may even wish to deploy their energies in some new ventures while, of course, always supporting Bray Arts. It's up to you!

## Submission Guidelines

Editor : Dermot McCabe : editor@brayarts.net

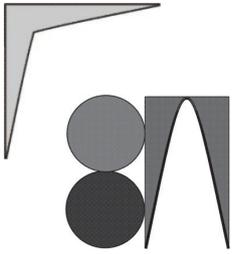
Creative Writing Editor : Anne Fitzgerald :  
afitzgerald3@ireland.com

Email submissions to any of the above or post typed submissions to

The Editor BAJ 'Casino',  
Killarney Rd. Bray,  
Co. Wicklow

Visual material: Photographs by Post. Digital Images by  
Email or CD in JPEG format.

Deadline 15th of each month.



*Arts Evening Monday 12th May  
at the Heather House Hotel Strand Road 8:00 pm  
5 Euro / 4 Euro Conc. Everyone is welcome.*

**Crossing the Bar** : Prize winning one-act Drama by **Bray Arts** theatre group.

**Padruig MacFarlane-Barrow** : Reads from his memoirs  
*Life is for Living* with accompanying visuals.

**Jimi Cullen**: Exciting and original singer/songwriter with  
mixture of Folk, Blues, Grunge and Rock.

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