

Robyn Rowland

From the sequence *Family Catalogue*

2 Moving on

1880 Annie Harding Lambert

After 1880 the severity of scarlet fever diminished
The Victorian City: Images and Realities, Volume 1
Eds. Harold James Dyos, Michael Wolff

Born in Cloyne, I married him out of the Fairy Field
Kilmallock, a fine spring day. Nights you could hear them,
the small folk, but I was never afraid. Some said it was the
clear River Loobagh with its fat salmon splashing, but I knew.

My father John Harding was a cobbler, a journeyman
moving about to fix the feet of those who could pay.
But he could make just about anything. I loved it there,
the Golden Vale feeding us butter bright as sunlight.

When the hunger broke on us in a long wave of death
people crowded the poor house in town, starving in rags,
green from eating grass and I never understood it as
the Vale kept sending butter to the docks in Cork.

But I was only ten then, certain my father could fix it.
He couldn't. But he and mother fed us, kept us close
til it passed. We had some fish and what we grew and eggs.
The river swept on. I needed that sound for sleeping.

I waited, uncertain to lock myself into any man.
But him with his blue eyes and the shadow in them restless,
yes, I believed he'd wander and take me with him.
But the main place he travelled was over my skin.

I loved that. Yes. The sigh of it. I wonder at a man –
the way he can do that – draw you into liquid. I'm glad
it's been him, Joseph, and only him. Nothing in him
ever to be fearful of. As a servant, I had met the others.

My mother said take this one in his smart RIC uniform

his kindness is in his hands, and she was right. Older, yes, but what's sixteen years or so, just his fun behind him except for me and I liked it that they'd move us on every four years.

Tabert Barracks was first and I was awed. My own rooms and the Shannon taking the night in its arms with lullabies. Brideswell a solid prison not near the house. No fear for Joe. Sea scent and the walls of salt. I have to live near moving water.

Clever both of us reading, writing, though it got me nowhere. He rose to Constable though he'd argue too much and be fined! And we got stuck in Cappamore, a small town – very. I don't understand why they broke the rule, allowed us get so friendly with the locals.

I felt at home. The Mulcair rushing in winter, blue herons rising over stark leafless trees, salmon leaping in their struggle to breed, green embrace of the Slieve Felim mountains behind. And the children were happy. We had the eight. He laughed when I said, no more!

Two streets, one pub, the barracks warm, well built, secure. It was never attacked, everyone in that town were neighbours. But safe? No-one's safe from the Red Breath. I had thought Joe a rover, but that's what moved him on after all – five of his eight children dead.

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3. Prosperity Square 1881 Annie Harding

Cork city is a watery place so I'm home.
We walk streets that are not really streets,
just a trick over the veins of the Lee.
I can hear it grumbling along under the pavements
making its way toward the biggest ocean I can imagine,
then faraway-lands all brimming with weird
animals, with people not scrawny from hunger.

Prosperity Square is a floating island in the tide of
poverty, the wash of filth that flooded in with the famine.
Open sewers ooze and Barrack Street is a haze of
diseased air. Featherbed Lane's a bit too close, though the
women are so busy on their backs, no bother. We passed
all the tests for the Cork Improved Dwellings Company.
Joe's pension, his good name, and mine – Harding – I'll never let that go.

Our so-small family will just fit, our grief. I love the neatness
of this house – its thin red bricks that have travelled over seas,
its blue-brick bands over the window and door arches.
Small diamonds are cut above them with our number, 27,
brass-bright. I put up lace curtains. Each day, five flowers in the window.
The potato market at the corner sometimes has a flower seller.
I try for sun-yellow, but too often she only has red.

The lads are quiet. I think it's fear. Too much death at once,
five sisters, brothers, and they question how it chose; then
how it passed over them. As if I can answer that. I look to God,
what else? I'm Cork-born in Cloyne. I'm a strong woman.
But I couldn't save them. Inside this gated square we're safe, surely.
I wonder no-one climbs the walls but then for what?
The gatekeeper locks up at night from his corner house
and is good at his job. Jailer and carer both.

Stone child

Monument to the Martyrdom of Children (the so-called. Broken heart), Łódź

Initiative of pupils, Educational Centre for Deaf Children in Przemysl. designed by Jadwiga Janus. Foundation laid, September 13, 1969. Inscriptions

Let pass to future generations our common cry: Never again war, never more camps.

Unveiled 1971, plaque: *Received you life, today we give you only the memory*

It could be anywhere but it's Lodz.
The Broken Heart Monument –
naked body of a scrawny boy, stands emaciated.
Spine a cord of knots, head bald, his rib-shaped shadow
tunnels through her heart like a birth canal.
So high a real boy only reaches the top of his leg
his posture captures grief, loss, acquiescence.

At dark, you see the night sky through the gap,
the weeping elms, the school that borders the park.
Here once two children's camps locked-in hope.
Detention of the Polish young from all over,
even Vienna. Aged two to fifteen, Jewish, Roma or not,
no matter, just without parents – missing or dead or
suddenly in prison, confused or in resistance.

And camp two for the 'germanisation' for those 'nordic types'
ayran-looking enough to be sent Germany for adoption.
But over 16 was adult and shipped off to Auschwitz, Birkenau.
Twelve thousand possibly twenty passed through these two camps,
sixteen hundred lived here. Food short, all kinds of ravaging
took place. The ill, still living, were sent to the morgue.
Six hundred survived flogging, working to death, typhus.

Maria Jaworska (no. 501) remembers 10-year-old Teresa Jakubowska
beaten under cold water for bed-wetting, dying a few days later,
death recorded as tuberculosis. Like others, Zofia Kowalewska
(no. 5963) fears anyone looking at her now, decades after the war.
The stone boy leans into that huge heart in the park – eight metres high –
heart of one who misses him. Where he was once held,
only the empty space of his shape that once passed through.

Robyn Rowland has nine books of poetry, most recently *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Canakkale 1915* (Five Islands Press, 2015). Irish-Australian, Robyn lives half-time in Connemara. Her work has appeared in forty anthologies and journals, and in *Best Australian Poems*, 2014, 2013, 2010, 2009, 2005 and 2004 (Black Inc). Robyn won the Catalpa Poetry/Writers Prizes from Australian-Irish Heritage Association, Jean Stone Poetry Prize, Poetica Christi Poetry Prize, Writing Spirit Poetry Award (Ireland); was shortlisted for the Newcastle Poetry Prize, 2013 and the ACT Judith Wright Poetry Prize, 2007.