

Taking Flight

By Rachael Hegarty

Rachael Hegarty received an M.Phil. in Anglo-Irish Literature in 1995 and an M.Phil. in Creative Writing in 2000. Rachael won the Francis Ledwidge Prize and Over the Edge New Writer of the Year. Her debut collection, "Flight Paths Over Finglas" was awarded the 2018 Shine Strong Award.

Flight Paths Over Finglas

We didn't pay that much heed to planes, those jet streams toing & froing at Dublin Airport. Da taught us to keep nix, watch birds for their covert flight paths on warm shafts of seasonal winds and late daylight over Finglas. The cuckoo, Hera's bird, announced each late spring. Swifts scudded, courted above the Tolka's root-ivy summer. Corncrakes in Darcy's side-garden scurried and secreted autumn. Out at Dollymount, the Brent geese wing-spanned an ivory wintertime. The finches' rise and fall – their hard flap, all that graft for a long easy glide. We learned the most from the home place's birds. Our old feathered banner: the ravens. How they mastered gravity vectors, omnivore feeding, prey-dodging and cloud-top scaling. They could sense a shift in a skyscape or how a brattling rainstorm may wreck the memory map back to the hatchling, nestling, fledgling grounds. Our ravens always returning to that magnetic place. We heard wingbeats. Gazed up. Ravens flocked. Their sudden soaring over our estate, out beyond Finglas.



WHERE DO YOU DRAW INSPIRATION FOR YOUR POETRY?

People and places seem to trigger the poem-making part of me heart and brain. It could be horses on the Finglas dual carriageway, a pond west of Boston or a rice paddy in rural Japan... the sense of a place seems to nudge me towards the writing space. Or people, mainly my family, also inspire some kinda creative fire. My eight brothers and sisters all wanted to have their own poem in me book. So I wrote poems to honour them and their work... hence one sister got a poem in the shape of a HSE bed hoist because she is a care assistant, and two brothers got a poem in the shape of a retractable wrench because they're plumbers.

HOW DID THE M.PHIL. IN CREATIVE WRITING INFLUENCE YOUR WORK?

The workshops with Brendan Kennelly and Gerry Dawe were pure gift. Having one whole year to write and rewrite until the poem looked righter was deluxe. Brendan and Gerry were deadly facilitators – they'd pour on the praise like I was a seed needing some water and make gentle suggestions as to how to improve the work. Me classmates were great too, everybody was encouraging, digging one another out of creative black holes and laughing with each other. I try to take that learning fun into my TAP classes – I reckon if me students are laughing they are more likely to be learning.

TELL US ABOUT THE POETRY SCENE IN IRELAND AS YOU SEE IT?

Poetry is kicking arse in Ireland. We have such a long and lovely tradition of song. I didn't grow up with poetry books but I grew up with sing-songs... Me Da could belt out Auld Triangle and me Ma has a great head for laments like Down by the Sally Gardens. I think as long as working-class people have songs, they will wanna make poems too. Working-class identified poets are still underrepresented in the publication world, however I think that's changing. In the same way women poets used to be woefully underrepresented and now they too are kicking arse. I love the poetry scene in Ireland.