

Memories in Dialogue

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translated into Italian by Andrea Bergantino



Of Hollies and Other Little Wonders: In Conversation with Seán Hewitt

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Abstract:

Born in Warrington, UK, Seán Hewitt is an acclaimed author and poet, critic, and lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, where he now resides. He has been hailed as one of the most talented young voices in Irish literature and culture today, and he has received a number of awards, including the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature (2022) and The Poetry School's Resurgence Prize (for eco-poetry). Hewitt's writing explores themes of identity, memory, and the environment, with particular attention given to how the episodic or temporal is linked to larger historical and cultural issues. This interview was conducted online in the Spring of 2024 with the aim of showcasing his work and his ideas to an Italian audience.

Keywords: Seán Hewitt, Interview, Irish Poetry, Translation

1. Introduction

A picture shows the close-up of a bed, unmade. A pillow, with the impression of a head. In place of the head, a photograph depicting a park walk, a tree, and a bench. The bench is empty. There is nobody around. Absence is the only visible presence in the photograph. Histories of violence both lived and inherited have instructed some people, not others, to read this scene as the memorialisation of a death. With this shot, Brian Teeling¹ re-activates the memory of Declan Flynn (1951-1982), a gay man who was beaten to death in Fairview Park, Dublin in the early 1980s – a murder with no conviction that has lived through to the present as “a foundational injustice in the Irish LGBTQ+ Pride movement” (Taylor 2024)². This space is a powerful lo-

¹ At the time of writing, “Declan Flynn in Dublin” (2021) can be seen on the website of The National Gallery of Ireland, <<https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/exhibitions/zurich-portrait-prize-2021/declan-flynn-dublin#na>>.

² Another memory is activated, one more “allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives” (Muñoz 1999, 170), to borrow from José Esteban Muñoz's powerful annotation of Félix González-Torres billboard, *Untitled* (1991), where the impression of a head on the pillow is the sign of

cation from where to address all that has been concealed from dominant LGBT archives. There is so much we still need to listen to.

The poet, memoirist, novelist and literary critic Seán Hewitt is one of the emerging voices in Ireland exploring what listening to “the chorus of voices” in the Irish queer archive(s) involves. His homage to Flynn, “We didn’t mean to kill Mr Flynn” (Hewitt 2024, 16), featured in this issue of *Studi irlandesi*, gathers several “fragments of language” he accessed while working at the Irish Queer Archive. The resulting poem re-stages the night of Flynn’s murder, “ventriloquis[ing] him through the voices of family, friends, and details from court proceedings” (Taylor 2024). The poem fiercely confronts the reader with trans- and homo-phobic violence and its enduring legacy, which Hewitt seeks to transform into artistic expression, the clearing of a space for something else:

This particular poem came after reading quite a few boxes of materials from newspapers and magazines relating to Flynn’s murder, and hearing so clearly the voices of his killers recounted in them. Of course, I couldn’t let Flynn’s voice speak, because he died before any of those texts were written, so I had to. The idea of footnoting the sources of the poem came through a desire to point a reader to the reality of the language, which is often shocking in both its unguarded brutality and its powerful, defiant sense of tragedy. (Taylor 2024)

Hewitt’s first collection, *Tongues of Fire*, addresses the experience of queer people “growing into sex and shame” (Hewitt 2020); but it also sets the scene for his distinctive looks at the natural world, where being, feeling, and gathering a sense of oneself all combine in unison. In the Resurgence Prize-winning “Ilex”, the speaker is distractingly walking, when suddenly they discover a white holly plant, a symbol of “endurance against adversity” (Emerald Isle), the combination in nature of fragility and persistence. This holly evokes mediaeval relics and ancient unearthed artefacts. The poem then transitions to the speaker’s personal struggle with a baby who won’t latch, drawing a parallel to the holly’s delicate nature: “and I came back to this holly, unhardened // by the sun, unable to turn the light / into strength” (Hewitt 2020: 42). The hope is for the flower to never learn the arts of hurting, of damaging others (“may it never learn the use of spikes”), but conversely, to shine their existence into the ordinary made exceptional, what looks like the tiny little part of the worlds we want to treasure as the richest beauty: “may the people approach one by one / to witness how a fragile thing is raised” (*ibidem*). Hewitt recalls sending the poem to a competition where the jury assumed the author was a woman, highlighting the idea of a possible genderless writing:

I think it’s interesting if you remove the image of the poet, how different the poem can be. Almost anyone can speak the text, can be the ‘I’ of the poem. So it’s interesting to me that the poem could be genderless or androgynous in some way, that it could also speak to experiences I’d never had. (in Solloway 2020)

a death from AIDS. The two scenes cannot be compared, their incommensurability includes, at least, the cause of one’s death, the subjectivity of the dead, and the different regimes under which their death took place. In spite of their incommensurability, however, they prompt a similar reflection concerning the possibility to imagine otherwise, to pre-figure a different space within the traumatic moment (past or present): “touched by the catastrophe of HIV and other genocidal epidemics, the image is an allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives, Latino/a lives, and many other communities at risk or people who share this structure of feeling”.

2. Conversations, poems, worlds

The interview originated from the journal editorial team's desire to showcase Hewitt's work to an Italian audience, inspired by the recent translation into Italian of Hewitt's and Luke Edward's 300,000 Kisses, *300.000 Baci. Racconti d'amore queer dal mondo antico*, published by independent Milan-based publisher Ippocampo and reviewed by Diego Salvadori in this section. Readers will discover various aspects of the poet's life and career, from his creative writing and teaching at renowned Irish institution Trinity College Dublin to his more personal narrative moments, when for instance, he remembers the experience of writing his memoir, *All Down Darkness Wide* (2022). When selecting the texts, preference was given to poetry, which allows readers to delve into the influence of poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins to Jesmyn Ward on Hewitt's work. Previously in interview, Hewitt cited Seamus Heaney as a major influence on his poetry, dating back to his formative years in Britain:

We were given various models that I could have gone to, and Heaney was the one that I chose. But at other moments I ran away from Heaney's influence because there is something about the music and the language of his poetry so embedded in me that I worry it comes too easily. When I sit down, I can almost write a parody of a Heaney poem. So there were a couple of years when I actively tried to escape that influence. I brought him into my work in a way that I was happy with – by throwing him up against queer poetry. I escaped my Heaney parodies by blending Heaney with the people I was reading at the time like Danez Smith, Ocean Vuong, Mark Doty, and queer American poets. I think that intersection is where my poems came from. And I think Heaney is definitely one tributary into the writing. (Sullivan 2023, 144)

The section features four poems from *Tongues of Fire* and one from his more recent collection, *Rapture's Road* (2024), where Hewitt's residency at the Irish Queer Archive is a key source. Quite a few of Hewitt's poems included here, like "St John's Wort" / "Erba di San Giovanni" (Hewitt 2020, 11) and "Wild Garlic" / "Aaglio selvatico" (Hewitt 2020: 18) are heartfelt reflections on the themes of nature, history, and the desire for connection; however, in the former this is counteracted by the awareness of an impending loss – in Hewitt's case, his father. The saint's decapitated head is thus transfixed into a beloved's head, held reassuringly between one's hands, with the yellow-laden illuminations springing from the herb, care, and love embracing a hospital bed ("Bringing no gift, I took your head / in my empty hands like a world and held it"). Kelly Sullivan (2023) rightly notes how Hewitt's use of "Heaneyesque" language is particularly evident in "Old Croghan Man" / "Vecchio uomo di Croghan" (Hewitt 2020: 39), where the poet recounts the discovery of an Iron Age bog body³. "Ta Prohm" (Hewitt 2020: 64) is a profound evocation of the imposing history of monumental architecture and personal loss. Here, too, the mind goes back to a father lying in a deathbed, as nature descends to the ground, enveloping the whole scene in beautiful and generous greenery. In the midst of uncertainty about what lies ahead, the speaking 'I' seems to wonder: what if surviving is easier than we believed? Is this forgetting, or else is it a coping strategy for those who stay? Finally, "We didn't mean to kill Mr Flynn" / "Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn", from Hewitt's *Rapture's Road*, captures the cacophony of voices that demand to be heard, memorialising the silences within the queer archive. Death, mourning, and violence pervade these atmospheres, reminding us of the systematic domination intersecting gender, class, race, and sexuality.

³ The body was discovered in the area of Croghan Hill, in the Eastern and Midland part of the Republic of Ireland, in the early 2000s.

Transformative writing can heal, but it can also hurt. Hewitt emphasises the importance of being ready to listen, acknowledging the emotional complexities that writers, especially poets, navigate in their work.



SG: How has your identification as an openly gay author influenced your writing within the context of recent advancements in LGBT rights in Ireland? Have you come across any particular way or set of ways to reckon with the country's past that has stayed with you and with which you also come to terms?

SH: I think the term “openly gay” is a little dated, and though I’m not the sort of person who would want to distance myself from what that means, I do (forgive me) get a bit tired of being called upon as ‘the gay writer’ for panel events, workshops, pieces for the media, etc. Sometimes, it can feel like all you get to talk about is being a gay writer, or about gay literature, when actually you want to be in the other room, with all the rest of the people, who get to talk about big things like history, religion, politics, and, well, writing. I’m really glad there’s a platform for queer literature in Ireland now, though there’s still a long way to go, particularly for trans and gender non-conforming writers and people of colour. We identify ourselves in order to draw attention to an issue, and that is good, but that’s also, I hope, just a stepping stone along to a world where we won’t have to identify ourselves at all. I don’t feel like a ‘gay author’ when I’m at home, or when I’m on my own – I only get made to become a ‘gay author’ when I’m in public, and I have come to resent that a little, not because I resent being gay, but because I resent not getting to be an author like everyone else.

But what is good, in terms of labels, is that the interest in queer writing is providing opportunities for queer writers to platform their work, and to delve into queer histories in Ireland. This is aided by the work of activists, community works, magazines, and academics, all of which form a collective custodianship of the country’s queer past. I see my work, outside of writing, as a responsibility to new generations of queer writers to help them, mentor them, support them, and hold space for them. There is a lot of value in that, and it’s something I’m honoured to be able to do.

In 2021, I was writer in residence at the Irish Queer Archive, which was donated to the National Library of Ireland, and is a massive resource and treasure trove. Spending six months working through the manuscripts there informed many of the poems in *Rapture’s Road*, and one in particular, “We Didn’t Mean to Kill Mr Flynn”, translated in this journal by Andrea Bergantino, gives a window into the archive by citing various sources to piece together the story of a homophobic killing in Dublin. My work has a close relationship with history, in that way, and I hope that being in conversation with history gives depth and perspective to my writing.

SG: Could you share which authors or poets have influenced your work? What ways do you think your writing resonates with their voices?

SH: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Alice Oswald, W.B. Yeats, Tennyson, Thomas Hardy... Those are probably the classics. And, more recently, Jesmyn Ward, Sheridan Le Fanu, Jean Rhys, Carl Phillips, Sarah Perry. I can’t think what connects them all, because I tend to be reading things that are alike, somehow, to the sort of energy and atmosphere I’m trying to capture in my writing at any given time, and that changes for each poem, each project, but if I had to say what I love,

it's probably a sort of vulnerable formality, a commitment to atmosphere and the baroque, the decorated, a high register or atmosphere that admits, on occasion, a surprisingly human voice.

SG: You grew up and gained notoriety as a writer within the context of a shrinking book market, which has historically been a primary target of the devaluation of culture in neoliberal times. Concurrently, you also decided to pursue a career inside the academy, where the same market-driven mentality is deracinating intellectual curiosity, free thought and speech, and an education unmoored by capitalist values. How do you reconcile these two sides of your current life alongside the pursuit of a writerly future?

SH: In my own context, at Trinity College Dublin, I don't find there to be much to reconcile. The university is very supportive of my work, and I enjoy speaking to my students about books and their own writing. Being in that headspace for long periods of time is a privilege for a writer, because you're constantly thinking about the mechanics of literature, and you're around a group of excited, enthusiastic people. I also get periods of time to do my own writing, and have access to brilliant libraries, and my colleagues are full of ideas and information when I get stuck on research or for something to read. Also, we're lucky in Ireland to have a very healthy book market, and a very avid reading public, so I don't feel that I have too much to complain about in either regard. Academics have the right to complain, of course, but I come from a place where people have to do much worse jobs to earn a lot less money, so I remind myself of that often.

SG: You have referred to the act of translation as a means of exploring identities. Could you elaborate on how translation serves as a metaphor in your work, both in terms of language and personal experience?

SH: I think that translation, as metaphor, is a very potent one not only for writing, but for life. In writing, the whole world you want to create appears perfectly in your mind, and the (very difficult, basically impossible) task that you have is to lift that world out of the mind and onto the page, to let someone else live in it. That is an act of translation, from the pre-verbal language of the mind, to the language we use every day, and it's near impossible not to lose things along the way. The same goes for personal experience: we live entire, imagined, emotional, real lives in our heads; we carry so much history and thought with us, that never finds expression, and so when we try to communicate with each other, we often feel like we haven't quite excavated the heart of what we meant. We're translating all the time, from the subconscious to the conscious, the pre-verbal to the verbal, and things get lost, yes, but if we do it well, it's a sort of miracle.

SG: Your memoir All Down Darkness Wide, among other things, literalizes your vicinity to severe mental illness. The visceral, breath-consuming acknowledgment (or, sense of acknowledgment) of one's individual loneliness provoked by depression, for example, can be remembered by those who experience it as a devastating bodily memory. Yet, it may also remind us of how profoundly collective the experiences of mental health illness can be for LGBTQI+ people, and indeed, have been, particularly in times of "crises". Is there anything you have learned from this experience that you hope you are now taking with you, in terms of relationships with others?

SH: You're right. In the most basic way, I struggled to find a book about that experience when I was going through it – the experience of caring for someone in mental distress and

illness, that is – and so I wrote my own book in the hope that it might articulate things. I'm not an expert, nor a therapist, and so I don't like to use my own life or thoughts as an exemplar for others. I also don't like to take lessons from one relationship and apply them to another relationship – each relationship is its own, organic thing, and needs to be built from the ground up, and to develop its own set of experiences, on its own terms, though of course we try not to make the same mistakes we have before.

SG: Your background in literary studies and the environmental humanities overlaps with your poetic practice. In conversation/interview, you have admitted that All Down Darkness Wide “centres the natural world”, whereas Rapture’s Road is studded with “fear of environmental collapse” (Aitken 2023). How do these disciplines inform your exploration of queer ecologies and landscapes in your writing?

SH: In much the same way as any writer, I imagine, I follow my own interests in my reading and research, and that reading and research begins to inflect, or prise apart, the things I write. *All Down Darkness Wide* was not, really, a book about nature, though I have a tendency to focus on the natural world in all my work, to different degrees. *Rapture’s Road*, though, was a continuation of the project of my first collection, *Tongues of Fire*, but it is a more formally-ambitious book, in which the certainties – or near certainties – of the earlier poems are questioned, or collapse. If the poems in *Tongues of Fire* built a mythology of renewal, the poems in *Rapture’s Road* look into the opposing mythology, that of spiralling and ecstatic decline. During my PhD on the Irish playwright J.M. Synge, I read a lot of XIX century texts on animism, primitivism, and folklore, and these spark poems and images. For *Rapture’s Road*, that project continued, but I began to be more interested in queer ecologies, apocalypse, Hopkins, dreamscapes, nightmares. There's no direct or noticeable line between research and writing that I can identify: the best I can say is that, when I'm researching, certain images will lift into my mind and find language, and certain ideas will be noted down as possibly good for a poem.

SG: Collaboration seems to be an integral part of your creative process, whether it is working with other artists or engaging in interdisciplinary projects. How do these collaborations enrich your exploration of key themes in your poetry, and more generally, in your practice as interdisciplinary/intermedia artist?

SH: I myself am certainly not an interdisciplinary artist – I'm stuck with words, I'm afraid. But writing is an incredibly solitary practice, for the most part, and any opportunity to work with other people, and to take on practical tasks, is good for me. I come from a very practical family – joiners, mainly – and have always envied people who can occupy themselves with practical tasks. I love working with artists and illustrators because they see from a different angle – they're thinking about colour, perspective, dimension, and often the finished product of the book itself. Fundamentally, I think I like making things, and I see writing as an attempt to make something, and I like to work with other people who make things.

SG: There seems to have been renewed interest in poetry by Irish authors and in Irish poetry by literary and cultural critics outside of the island. I wonder if this is a sign of how, in times of crises and with the fear of collapse, writing poetry is revealed as feeling closer to a writer's self while finding solace in reaching out to the world. How do you feel about your poetry being seen as a healing practice?

SH: I don't believe that poetry is healing for the writer, but if people find it healing as readers, then that can be a good thing. I think that various things have led to the opening up of Anglophone poetry in the past decade: the internet, for a start; and a sort of transnational exchange of traditions; and a push to begin including more lives within the remit of the poetic subject. I don't believe in 'relatability' per se, but I do believe in the excitement of seeing some aspect of yourself reflected in literature, and that excitement has been multiplied as the subjects of writing have diversified. In terms of political and environmental collapse, I think poetry has a unique ability to distil complexity into forms which don't reduce that complexity – when the problems are so big that they are hard to comprehend, the poem can step in as a device for holding very large subjects. Poems are also, I think, particularly good at giving expression to anger, grief, protest, etc, because of their musicality. That is the most primal and valuable thing about poems, to me.

SG: While discussing All Down Darkness Wide in an interview with Andrea Bergantino (2022), you have spoken about memoir's ability to see ghosts as "reassuring figures who witness a certain kinship". How do you see the interplay between queerness, memoir, and these ghostly presences in your work? Is this also a charting of new forms of queer kinship?

SH: When I was writing *All Down Darkness Wide*, I began to see history as a sort of echoing tunnel. If I had an idea or experience now, in the present, I would test it to check for echoes in the past, to see if the sound of my own voice was returned, distorted perhaps, but still recognisable, by some historical figure. The people who returned those echoes most clearly were the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the Swedish poet Karin Boye. But I also began to think about these historical figures, or ghosts, if you will, as members of a cross-generational kinship. I think the idea of 'chosen families' common in queer thinking is a bit trite at times, but I believe in the necessity of antecedents, and these ghosts offered themselves as guiding spirits, or pastoral thinkers, for my own writing. Most queer people do not have queer parents, and so it is only natural that we should look to other figures to guide and educate us in some of the initiations we go through in life. On a literary level, it is important to me, when I write, to conjure a tradition for myself – it helps me to feel less alone in writing, perhaps.

SG: My last question is a counterintuitive move to shift my curiosity to the pleasure you seem to take in talking in public and giving interviews, acting as a would-be critic of your own work. Have you ever reflected on how this has played out in your writer's progress?

SH: I'm certainly not a critic of my own work, and tend to be much less articulate off the page. I enjoy reading my work aloud, and talking to readers, but I like discussing myself much less, and often struggle to discuss my work in a way that feels satisfying to myself. I think being a writer is a privilege, and being able to earn a living through writing is the most satisfying thing I can do. I don't tend to surround myself with other writers, nor to pay too much attention to trends; I prefer to surround myself with relatively normal people, with normal jobs, because I value the perspective that gives to me. The main role of public events and interviews is to connect with readers, to answer their questions as best I can, and hopefully to reassure them that the best answers I can give are all inside my books, and not inside myself. The reader is the critic, not the author. Once they're published, my books have relatively little to do with me, at least not in the grand scheme of things.

3. Reading with and about Hewitt

In addition to the works cited in the above, the following presents a list of Hewitt's major publications to date, followed by several readings (mostly interviews) that have informed the present interview. Most of the following entries are also recorded on Hewitt's website (<<https://www.seanhewitt.com>>), in addition to other useful material about the artist and his work.

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Five Poems by Seán Hewitt, translated by Andrea Bergantino*

“Erba di San Giovanni”

Prende il nome da un uomo che porta la propria testa
su un vassoio, da un giorno in cui il sole diffonde
la luce sulla terra in modo così lento, così misurato,
che la notte si rannicchia e aspetta. Un pegno
d’amore, di pazienza, della volontà di sollevare la mente
fuori di sé e lasciarla riposare. Lasciarla guarire. Solo,
mi ricordai di questa piccola pianta, le spine gialle
del fiore, gli orpelli dello stame, qualcosa di simile
alla felicità – le stelle luminose, una piccola recita
di speranza, quel suo modo di stagliarsi tra l’erba –
e la portai a te, una luce per illuminare
le fosse scure dei tuoi occhi. All’entrata
del reparto, dopo avermi perquisito, l’infermiera
si portò via la mia raccolta di fiori.
Ti trovai a letto, lo sguardo assente, ancora sconvolto.
Senza regali, ti presi la testa
tra le mani vuote e la mantenni come un pianeta.

“Aglione selvatico”

Nella boscaglia dopo la pioggia
(troppo tardi per essere qui).
Il terreno caldo, lo sgocciolio
di insetti dalle foglie.

Frugo tra i gambi teneri
e li giro fino a liberarli – petali fradici

* “St John’s Wort”, “Wild Garlic”, “Old Croghan Man”, and “Ta Prohm”
are published in *Tongues of Fire* (2020), “We didn’t mean to kill Mr Flynn” is
published in *Rapture’s Road* (2024).

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mi toccano il braccio, boccioli,
il prurito delle foglie, selvaticità

sulla pelle. Le piante portano con sé
un odore ricco di terra, troppo pesante
per sollevarsi all'altezza del capo, e gli stivali
e i jeans si macchiano di bianco.

Il sentiero di casa è tutto cosparso
di fiori bianchi e a punta
che illuminano la via. Il mondo è buio
ma il bosco è pieno di stelle.

“Vecchio uomo di Croghan”

*‘i capezzoli venivano loro tagliati di modo che non fossero idonei al trono... la suzione dai capezzoli
di un re rappresentava un importante gesto di sottomissione’*

Eamonn P. Kelly, ‘Un’interpretazione archeologica
dei corpi di palude dell’età del ferro irlandese’

Solo un torso ormai, la testa
recisa dal collo, il bacino
contorto come una radice testarda.

Ricordo la giacca consunta
del suo corpo schiacciata
nella palude; lassù, le galassie

di erioforo si sono volte
sotto sopra, come piccole anime
tra le eufrasie e

il centocchio. Non è un posto
dove lasciare solo un uomo.
E sotto i capezzoli

un’incisione profonda, larga quanto la lama.
Anche allora servivano ragazzi
come me – perché ci lasciassimo il potere

alle spalle, e abbassissimo la testa
per portarla a quella morbida
sporgenza rosa. Avrei sentito,

allora, il divenire di un re;
avrei saputo che Dio, attraverso le mie labbra,
stava entrando nel suo corpo.

“Ta Prohm”

Un calore soffocante – l’aria pesante –
e tutt’intorno la foresta rumorosa, bagnata
che annoda gli spazi vuoti nel suo suono.

Una pace conquistata da tempo, poi interrotta;
e tu, lontano, in un letto d’ospedale.
Un ficus strangolatore ha le radici

allacciate qui sul tempio
come se fosse cresciuto giù dal cielo,
inviato a tenere insieme

tutto questo lavoro umano. E poi,
attraverso la sala del fuoco e le gallerie
cadute, mi sono arrampicato nel fumo indaco

fino a dove sedeva la divinità
in cerchi d’incenso. E sì,
mi sono inginocchiato a lei. E sì, ho pregato

nella mia incredulità. Forse ora,
padre, solo qualcosa di antico
e impossibile può salvarci.

“Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn”

*Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn. Ho pensato che era gay e che era al parco per incontrare altre
persone gay. Eravamo a caccia di froci quell’estate.*

Dichiarazione di Anthony Maher riportata
dall’*Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983

I

È stato facile trovare delle buone mazze –
c’erano un sacco di alberi coi rami bassi*.
Eravamo lì in attesa, al buio

coi bastoni, il cappuccio sopra la faccia[†].
Paddy ha urlato due volte – ‘Prendi quel bastardo’[‡].
Ne avevamo menati venti di finocchi[§] quell’estate,

* *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 11.

† *The Irish Press*, 9 marzo 1983.

‡ *Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983.

§ *Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983.

noi in gruppo, per ripulire il parco da froci
e pedofili[†]. Forse quella volta abbiamo esagerato,
ma coi pervertiti bisogna fare qualcosa

di fisico – castrarli, non so**.
Così siamo corsi, tutti noi, e l'abbiamo inseguito
finché non è caduto, e ora riesco a pensare solo

al sangue che gli usciva dalla bocca.
L'ho rivoltato sul fianco
così non si strozzava*. Era pesante.

Quello me lo ricordo. E poi
ha smesso di parlare, immobile, e allora ho capito
che era morto[†].

II

Era una notte calda a Fairview.
Non un orto degli ulivi, ma un altro Getsemani
di betulle e platani vicino alle acque salmastre,

alle oscenità[‡] di corvi e gabbiani –
un buon posto per nascondersi, un bene
e un male. Io balbettavo e sono rimasto fermo

quando hanno urlato[§], e gli alberi a cui mi ero affidato
per coprirmi hanno offerto loro i rami –
colpi e frustate finché non è calato

il buio – e quello ero io, lì a terra
quando è arrivato lui, solo un lieve gorgoglio,
il sangue che mi sgorgava dalla bocca[¶].

Mi ci sono soffocato, così hanno detto. Mi hanno
fatto soffocare dalla mia stessa vita*. Poi, mio padre
in lacrime vicino al camino. Il bacio di un traditore, forse,

ma nessuna pietra è rotolata via, nessuna ascensione.
Sono usciti dal tribunale liberi, ha detto,
ma mio figlio non può più uscire dal cimitero di Glasnevin[†].

[†] “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.

^{**} *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 16.

^{*} Testimonianza di Robert Armstrong riportata in “Martyr in the Park”, *GI Magazine*, 2001.

[†] *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 16.

[‡] *Irish Times*, 21 marzo 1983.

[§] “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.

[¶] Testimonianza di John Sheridan riportata in *GI Magazine*, “Martyr in the Park”, 2001.

^{*} Relazione dell’inchiesta sulla morte di Declan Flynn. Causa del decesso: “Asfissia dovuta all’inalazione di sangue”.

[†] “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.