

Fiona Sze-Lorrain's elegiac poetry displays that preternatural sensitivity to words typical of the multi-linguist. Sifting through the several cultures that have formed her – English, French and Chinese – *Water the Moon's* limpid diction expresses emotion with restrained simplicity. Inevitably, she is drawn to pursue matters of identity and belonging – sometimes with a quizzical humour: 'Today I still have no idea // how to eat porridge with chopsticks' ('Breakfast, Rue Sainte-Anne'), other times with a flash of pain: 'Why is the edge always bleeding?' ('We'll Always Have Her'). Traces of ancient Chinese culture – the symbolic meanings of moon, calligraphy, 'ideograms of dashed bamboo and mandarin / ducks' ('My Grandmother Waters The Moon') – feature throughout the book. However, the collection is largely a testament to the rarer notion that you can choose to bestow your identity upon a landscape. It is Paris which ultimately emerges as Sze-Lorrain's spiritual home.

The writing is characterized by deliberation and an airy delicacy. Some poems feel less urgent than others but even the block poems breathe. Sze-Lorrain is alert to form and whilst the tercet stanzas of 'L'Assiette des Trois Amis' aren't wholly successful, the unrhymed villanelle 'Along Ludlow Street' with its sonic reversal of the plosives 'k' and 'p' in the words 'Cupid' and 'Peking', lingers.

The most memorable feature of Anthony Cronin's collection *The Fall* is the bathetic voice. This poet, writing in his eighties, covers history, life and death. Samuel Beckett has been described as being 'angry with God for not existing' and something of the same attitude is evident in Cronin's work which, in poems like 'On the Death of an Auschwitz Survivor' both takes God on and tells Him where to get off.

The danger of this particular cast of voice is that lines can veer towards the prosaic and essential musicality can be compromised. However the work is notable for its tenderness about human relationships. It asserts that ordinary life, our common humanity, is the most important stay against death and the passage of time. The enduring power of Ireland as

symbolic place – not mythical, but real, urban, everyday – put me in mind of Nick Laird's opening poem, 'Conversation', in *On Purpose* where an abruptly luminous image rises from chaos, violence and detritus:

Here. Where afternoon rain pools in the fields  
and windows in the houses facing west turn gold.

In 'Birthday Thoughts', in a stanza suddenly set apart, Cronin gives us a similar epiphanic moment:

I live in Ranelagh.  
I watch the clouds break  
Almost overhead.

That this may be all there is to say is not to deny the power of saying it, and indeed the latter infuses the former until assertion itself, like song, becomes the most important factor in our struggle against mortality. It is invigorating to read from a poet at this stage of life that joy is still very much a part of living and cannot be eclipsed by suffering. As he puts it in 'A Man':

Nevertheless he receives it  
Humbly, but as of right,  
This chance windfall of a happiness.

And to return to matters of form, one of the more striking poems in the book is the one from which it takes its title. 'The Fall', a subversive hymn of praise to the disgraced Adam and Eve, consists of four quatrains, rhyming on alternate lines, in the common measure of the ballad. It has an inner tension, born of form and content's dynamic cross-examination, as it salutes the first couple for choosing to quit the Garden in order to embrace only uncertainty and one another.

Ellen Cranitch's poems appear in *Oxford Poets 2010*, published by Carcanet.

## Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prizes for 2012

Prizes ranging from \$1,000 USD up to as much as \$25,000 USD will be awarded for the finest lyric poems celebrating the human spirit. The contest is open to all writers, published or unpublished, who will be under the age of 40 on November 6, 2011.

Closing date: 15th October 2011.

For full details go to [www.DorothyPrizes.org](http://www.DorothyPrizes.org)