
Think Piece by Poet Mary O'Malley

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The Weather Forecast

It starts in October, the merciless grey morass that gets worse in November and sucks you down into a boghole of misery. It's deep, and oozing, nearly as deep as the silence of a middle aged man in a McGahern novel. Rain. Imagine what all that dreck and drear does to the psyche. It's like the inside of *The Poor Mouth* and *The Hard Life* in there. It doesn't help either to have all this free advice about living in the moment, which only lasts three seconds. There are at least four months of moments and that's a lot to get through even if you're an optimist on a level with *Candide*. More likely five if you're a realist. The present is not the best place to be. The future isn't exactly promising either. The further outlook is even worse.

Rain starting in the morning, every morning, with a dry patch, then followed by more rain spreading from the West across the midlands to the east coast and covering Dublin, and by extension the whole country, by late afternoon. By eight o'clock on a typical October morning it's raining on your small town, on the roofs, in the heart not languorously, as it does in Verlaine's famous poem, but unpoetically and hard. By the end of the eight o'clock forecast, you feel guilty already for what's going to happen to Dublin. You imagine how nice it would be for them if there were no West Coast. You begin to imagine how such a thing might come to pass.

Say a man, or even a woman – woke up one morning and noticed that songbirds were following him everywhere. A simple peasant man (this is the West, after all) up early foraging among the rocks for whatever peasants forage among the rocks for, not diamonds, I can

attest to that, nor lobsters either, sloes probably. For sloe poitin, maybe. Possibly even carrageen.

He has a vision. Not, disappointingly, an Aisling, not maiden Ireland dressed in a filmy shift caught in an early shaft of dawn sunlight. His vision was more grounded. He thought he saw the rock moving. Nothing earth shattering, but there was a gentle sideways movement, exactly like a boat sliding into a trough. He shook his head and continued to gather his sloes or carrageen but he was perturbed and soon gave up. He started to walk inland and noticed the birds still circling his head were singing louder. I haven't made this up, Jose Saramago, the Portuguese novelist did that. The birds in his novel were a portent of the Iberian peninsula breaking away from the rest of Europe. A crack appeared and spread neatly enough along the border and the peninsula floated free.

The novel is called *The Stone Raft* and by now you can get the drift of where this might be going. Fast forward to the West of Ireland afloat in the Atlantic, not bothering Dublin with rain and storms, not asking for roads or hospitals or objecting to water gadgets being attached to our houses. Where will Dublin get its weather from now? Not our problem. Probably from London or perhaps Athlone.

But what about us? We've got Shannon, and Knock and we might float further South, with a fair wind, and attach ourselves to Greece or Spain. Which would improve things weather-wise, if nothing else. It's true we would have lost our capital, but like Groucho Marks' principles, there are other capitals, and with better looking ruins. That way the peasant could

forage around for grapes and oranges, pick lemons for his poitin instead of sloes. In fact, he might even add a few bitter herbs for the sake of his health.

I'm not advocating secession. This is a fantasy and as fantasies go, it's harmless enough. Anyway, the Government has a plan and they're digging up Ireland to put it into action. It will improve matters no end, they tell us. They're going to charge for the stuff. At first I thought maybe they were charging the weather God, who would look at the bill, throw his divine hands up and roar at the weathermen: *Turn off that rain this minute. Do you see what it's costing us?* But no, they are cleverer than that. They let on they're going to charge us for

it. They're gas, alright. But it's all a trick. Harmless enough in a paternalistic kind of way. What has led me to this conclusion? Reason, of course. Be reasonable, they are always telling me, so I'm trying it out. And what with the state of the weather and the mental health services, there is only one sane conclusion. Some bright spark in the think tank must have heard of Karl Marx's statement about religion being the opium of the people and, religion being dead, spotted an opening. That charge is for prozac, which they're going to distribute through the 'water meters'. That is what they're planning to use them for, isn't it? Surely they didn't expect us to believe they'd charge us for rain.

Mary O'Malley was born on the West coast of Ireland, where she now lives. She is the author of six poetry collections – *A Consideration of Silk* (Salmon, 1990); *Where the Rocks Float* (Salmon, 1993); *The Knife in the Wave* (Salmon, 1997); *Asylum Road* (Salmon, 2001); *A Perfect V* (Carcenet, 2006), *Valparaiso* (Carcenet, 2012) – and the latest, *Playing the Octopus*, shall be published in July 2016. Her poems have been translated into several languages and received numerous literary awards. She was involved in setting up the Women's Studies Centre in University College Galway and has written extensively on the need to include the voices of women writers in the Irish literary canon.