

Insistence

by Ailbhe Darcy

(Bloodaxe Books)



Ailbhe Darcy was born in Dublin in 1981 and grew up there before studying at the University of Notre Dame in the US, and teaching there and at the University of Münster in Germany. Her work was included in the Bloodaxe anthologies *Identity Parade* and *Voice Recognition*, and in her pamphlet *A Fictional Dress* (tall-lighthouse, 2009). *Imaginary Menagerie* (Bloodaxe Books, 2011), her first book-length collection, was shortlisted for Ireland's dlr Strong Award at Poetry Now / Mountains to Sea. Her second collection, *Insistence*, was published by Bloodaxe in 2018. She lectures in Creative Writing at Cardiff University.

Reviews

Darcy situates our human “enclosures” in a particular ecological context: silverfish, cockroaches, stinkbugs, jellyfish, mushrooms are the subjects of curious, interesting poems. The prism through which she records encounters with these creatures is also her subject, noticing the odd light that words cast on the world (“Mushrooms could grow on a person”, she writes, with unnatural relish). In a terrific poem, *Still*, she writes with some irony, “some things are unnameable – / or some names are unspeakable – but we / are well capable of words –”. (*The Irish Times*)

A new child should mean new hope. But what if that's no longer so? Ailbhe Darcy's second collection unfolds in an intimate world, in which the words *home* and *love* dominate. But the private world is threatened by a public one. Written in the American Rust Belt, in an era of climate change and upheaval, *Insistence* takes stock of the parent's responsibility to her child, the poet's responsibility to the reader, and the vulnerability of the person in the face of global crisis. (*The Poetry Book Society*)

Postcards from Europe 1

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Our paper lanterns are not flares but sparks
off some imagined bonfire while somewhere

Europe dreams of burning, dreams of bombs
that will be sent off here and there, piercing

light, their history a history of staring
into fire. Europe dreams of burning,

dreams of bombs. A bomb is made, in part,
of light, of visits to the cinema, where Paris,

made of light, must be annihilated first.
Our lanterns are not flares but sparks.

Here the harvest's in, the children witness
to corn's absence in the field, the quince trees

stripped of all their quinces. Europe dreams of
burning, dreams of bombs. We sing and see

St Martin on his horse, a vision of the strangeness
little children swim in, beneath the light of stars.

Beneath the stars, the light of us. Our paper lanterns,
swinging as we walk, are not flares but sparks

off some imagined bonfire while somewhere
Europe dreams of burning, dreams of bombs.

Umbrella

Look at this couple scooting round the grass;
you can see that he's spoken the rain
so they can hold the umbrella together.

It's not an umbrella, it's a silken manifestation
of something they've talked over and over.

So they parade it before guided tours,

the man with two croissants, the official lovers.

In their slipstream sunshine floats across
blind brick faces, puddles where I stop to cross

the road. It's a creature they're minding, a parallel
universe.

Later they'll shelve its sinuous objections

and carry the umbrella upstairs to its aquarium.
Kiss it, wish it goodnight, godspeed, slán abhaile.

I love how it moves, so queerly eely through
that briny otherworld in which we can only splash.

After My Son Was Born

I'd a snip cut in his tongue.
Blood scissored down his chin.
At every squall I'd been unsnibbing
myself and starving him. He knocked
me so my nose coughed blood,
punched a finger through my cornea.
Blood blubbed on my nipple
where his gums met. On the radio
somebody was saying something about Syria.
My son jerked knots of hair from my head,
tears dashed off his fontanelle. He'd fixed
my hips so my clothes didn't fit. I blundered
him once against the door-jamb:
blood. I'd bit his father
when we were younger, drinking harder,
made blood come then. Twice I tried to leave
him screaming, twenty minutes at a time,
but couldn't keep schtum.
One breakfast I broke the mug that insisted
'Don't Mess With Texas.'
Smashed it. And all the time
I smiled so much my teeth dried.
He made everything heavy.
Like they say the bomb did for a while,
so that Americans swam
through their homes, eyes peeled,
picking up everyday things and dropping them
as though they were violated with light and pain.
As though blood hadn't always been there, waiting.

Discussion Ideas

- Who is St Martin? There are a few of them; who is the one most likely to be featuring in 'Postcards from Europe'? Do you need to know who he is to appreciate the poem? There's no footnote about him in the book – what assumptions of shared knowledge are poet and publisher making about their readership?
- The 'Postcards from Europe' sequence of three poems ends with the lines 'How we might insist on going around again, / on none of this business of history / having anything to do with itself'. What does it mean for an Irish poet to be publishing 'Postcards from Europe' with an English publishing house at this moment in history? Who is Ailbhe Darcy talking to, and from what perspective? Is that information which can be authentically gleaned from the poem?
- Ailbhe Darcy is not the only artist to work with the metaphorical potential of the umbrella – [Rihanna did similar!](#) How does the relationship in the poem differ from the relationship in Rihanna's song? Where do the pair in the poem stand in relation to 'official lovers'? What do the 'I' and 'we' in the final stanza think of the world under the umbrella?
- A newborn baby compared to a nuclear bomb (in 'After My Son Was Born'). What do the parents in your group think of that analogy? What about the non-parents?
- What other poems about early motherhood would you recommend to new parents? Try the work of Kate Clanchy, Liz Berry and Fiona Benson to begin with.

Other books by Ailbhe Darcy

A Fictional Dress (tall-lighthouse, 2009)

Imaginary Menagerie (Bloodaxe, 2011)

If you liked Ailbhe Darcy, try ...

- Martina Evans
- Liz Berry
- Tara Bergin

Ailbhe Darcy online

[Ailbhe Darcy at the Poetry Foundation](#)