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School of Media


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Brood

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Brood

A Long Poem by Ian Kilroy

for Tom Murphy

Filmed for television and broadcast on Network 2 in 1997

Sections of the poem were previously published in

The Cúirt Journal, vol. 2, Fitzpatrick, Trish (ed), Galway Arts Centre Ltd, 1994

Poetry Ireland Review, issue 45, Cannon, Moya (ed), Poetry Ireland Ltd, spring 1995

Film Details

Title	BROOD
Production company	Percival Films Irish Film Board/Bord Scannán na hEireann Radio Telefís Eireann/RTE
Country of origin	Ireland
Director	McCAFFERTY, Frankie
Script/Adaptation	McCAFFERTY, Frankie KILROY, Ian (Based on a poem by)
Colour	col
Sound	sound
Production date	1997
Copy	RTE
Summary	Based on Ian Kilroy's poem depicting the generation that grew up since Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland in 1979.
Format	Digital Video

Brood:

1. The young of an animal produced at one hatching or birth.
2. The children in a family.
3. A group of related things.
4. To worry or ponder resentfully.

Young people of Ireland,
I love you.
—*Pope John Paul II,*
Galway 1979.

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

Matthew Arnold

I.

I have here the fragments of Ireland's youth,
In all glory and shame,
Screaming at home on Saturday nights
Or whispering across waves of water to be voiced.
Not on sanitised national networks
Or ink-treated and airbrushed in morning papers.
Not as training scheme names,
University stuffing,
Student holiday loan recipients or
'Our most valued resource'.
I have here the flesh, the blood
To wet the hands of handshaking conferrers of
Diplomas and degrees,
Held by smiling gowned models for the provincial press,
Looking sweet, admired by neighbours who don't know
That they drank their way through college and
Were up fucking bareback against a night-club wall
The night before.

I have here the quite shirt-collared kid,
'Harmless', they say,
Following the route from family farm to accountancy classes,
No girl or bad habits,
No trouble, no bank debt,
But with a father's gun to smoke life from his temple,
Leaving behind a fog of shock.

I have here the testimony
As yet unspoken
By the Galway Pope-lovers
Whose hearts are broken.

On this winter street the night-clubs are shut.
An odd solitary form staggers home,
His feet trailing through the cold trampled chips,
The torn brown paper bags, the rubbish and puke,
Left behind where the party has never started.

Who is it flinched at the final moment?
Who is it then that saw her later,
In a darkened corner with another?
Who is it then that drank full fathom fivers,
Borrowed for payment later?
Who is it that is not living though breathing,
Who is it that will live, not now,
But later?
Always later.

Nobody?
A nobody.
A smaller than small.
But the inner anger,
But with the inner anger of,
Can the world not feel the inner anger that is
Bigger than big.

That shouts over dance music when dragged out screaming
And is kicked by bouncers in the rainy night.
That splits the innocent head of a solitary walker,
But is only arrested later
For telling the cops what they are.
That bleeds the aching night in a cell,
Waking up with no memory of what happened.

I have here the testimony
As yet unspoken
By the Galway Pope-lovers
Whose hearts are broken.

And in the local chipper dreams are written
In the thick table grease by an index finger.

A drawing of the sun smiling,
The name of an exotic city,
The phone number of an unrequited lover
Are among the dreams to be wiped away
When the work is done at the end of the day.

Or

A game of X's and O's when business is slack
And the boss is out—
Each player trying to win within the game's strict limits

And

‘Were you out last night Michelle?’

And

‘Did you see the cut of him?’

And

‘When I was in Tenerife last Christmas...’

And

Why am I growing old

In this godforsaken shithole.

In this godforsaken shithole where

One night out a week I get groped by the local losers,

Who weren’t man enough to cut the apron strings,

Who weren’t man enough to go like the rest,

Who weren’t man enough.

A bus goes by.

It slowly crawls the main street,

Shannon bound.

Those faces are coming from somewhere,

Are going somewhere.

They all survey the town from high windows

For a moment and

Are gone.

I have here the testimony

As yet unspoken

By the Galway Pope-lovers

Whose hearts are broken.

II.

My symbol is not tower but pit,
The upset stomach of a land
That has swallowed too many falsities.

My muse is not in the shape of a goddess,
It is rather the glossy pages
Of a magazine wanked over by frustrated youth.

We are sick of statues and masks.
Is this not a line of flesh and blood?
Can you not see the bad complexion underneath?

III.

In London and New York
We have a rootless freedom,
And in the bars we strip our bodies in an ecstatic drunken show.
Followed behind the toilets
We give head to the highest bidder,
And if we need the money
The whole bar might get a go.

This is the wreckage we have forgotten,
Washed up on other shores.
The wreckage that sits coked and rocking,
In the window on the second floor.
That nightly wanders bewildered
Down a Hammersmith road,
In cold rags ripped,
Without money,
Without a home.

Yes, we are all running
By drinking ourselves dull,
Running fast from something,
With a new face over an old skull.
Yes, we are all running
To where other winds blow,
Not knowing that by running
You come full circle,
Meet what you already know.

This is the wreckage
That...
This is our wreckage.

But there were the happy as well,
Summer students
Waiting on Holborn restaurant tables or
Serving drinks in Brooklyn.
With apartment parties at the weekends,
Baths full of cheap iced beer and
Cheap grass to smoke away from mammy.

And someone to love from June to October.
Sweetly living in sin all summer,
With pregnancy scares and stomachs pumped,
Freedom was a lover with whom to fight
And then to leave with the conclusive argument of time.

But first there are footballs to be kicked
In long Central Park summer afternoons and
Cider to be slugged in Camden Town Sundays—
Where the unbelievable day ends with the haze of dusk
And every bed is already heated by lovers.

Here is the freedom of release,
Here the blank page,
Choose your mark to scrawl,
Abroad, without personal history.
You have been reborn,
Have come salty and dripping from the Atlantic spray,
Thrown up by the ocean,
You are naked and may choose your dress,
May reinvent for a time in life's feast,
Summer sun-lit and short lived as Gatsby,
Or the leaves lining the college lanes in autumn.

But

Yes, we were happy

And

Yes, we were content.

Yes,

Unlike other emigrant souls.

Builders who clap delighted at Californian earthquakes

Bringing the prospect of work.

Those who can't fly home for holidays

For fear of not getting back.

Those who dream all summer of Christmas

At home, only to leave again,

With crying parents a little older

And hopes a little tamer.

Those who will change and

Those who will grow strange.

These are the lost friendships

That...

These are our lost friends.

IV.

In a cider party playground
A cat is killed,
A slow sacrifice to the tribe.
Tail cut,
Eye burned,
Neck cracked,
And a blood bond then,
The lad's hands tied with rope
In a union to be broken only by gaol,
Or a shotgun union of another kind.

There's a home-made tattoo to be displayed
And a fuck last night to tell of
And some whiskey robbed from a storeroom
To beat each other up for.

So

What are ye lookin' at?

So

Give us a pound or I'll fuckin' smash ye.

So

No, yer honour, no.

But Boder the mad bastard raped the bitch,
He fuckin' did,
The mad cunt,
His hearing was due today,
But he hung himself first.
Found by his Ma this morning,
The stupid prick.

But

Give us a butt on that fag.

But

Mac is sellin' cheap wine.

But

I'll smash any fucker that looks at me.

Then I saw two fuckers kissin',

Men I'm tellin' ye,

On the fuckin' mouth.

So myself and Snatcher followed them,

Into the public jacks it was,

And BANG, open the door,

Their trousers down,

And one of them...

Fuck it.

It was disgusting.

Snatcher's chain did the job.

And

The pigs busted me

And

A few slaps will set her right

And

Vinno's been caught for robbin'.

Then last Friday we ran into them,
After they wouldn't let us in the disco,
Ye know, those cunts that beat up Matthew.
Well what we didn't do to them.
Tommy had his knife and lost the head
And Snatcher bit the cunts ear half off.
The other two we left for fucked.

So

What are ye lookin' at?

So

Give us a pound or I'll fuckin' smash ye.

So

No, yer honour, no.

V.

But now it is the weekend, a Saturday.
Ex-patriots are back again,
Back for a decreasingly frequent visit.

Circles of friends exchange
Cigarettes, news, addresses,
Block the pathways of harassed pram-burdened mothers.

In this circle the flowing tide of Shop Street
Is held at bay,
In this circle responsibility is held at bay,
In this circle the chain links are rusting
In a constantly driving rain.

‘How’s Trinity going Séamus?’
‘Ah, you know. Finishing up in a few months.’
‘Are you in Belfast now Clare?’
‘Yeah. I’m finishing the course. Moving in with Séan.’
‘We’ll have to get together some weekend.’
‘Yeah. Yeah. We’ll have to get together.’
‘Come up to Dublin some weekend when there’s a party,
Sleep on the couch.’
‘Yeah. Some weekend. Maybe next week.’
‘Maybe next week.’

We speak in formulas,
Learned lines,
Hollow lines,
Rehearsed in our late teens for performance in our twenties.
Time edits our scripts,
Tapering off into silence and, finally
Absence.

‘Maybe next week.’

We leave much unresolved.
We take enough to think about
For the rest of our lives.

But now we are young and indecisive.
We must hang,
Must be frozen,
Must not decide.
For decision is commitment, and commitment leads
To a road whose length is measured in years.
We will therefore attempt to go nowhere.
We will discuss
Where we will go for coffee.

And when we hear of each break-away we shiver.
Michael is working in Paris now,
He walks the boulevards with confidence,
His pockets sound a self-satisfied music,
Thirty pieces of silver.

To leave is to betray,
To turn your back,
To break away.

To leave is to change,
To kiss the cheek of the future
And smash the circle of apostles
Into points of individual fate.

VI.

My part is the part of a leaf,
Branchless and floating on a new wind,
From a new direction.

No roots are mine,
To clutch deep into a familiar soil,
To speak of familiar histories in a homely tongue,
To look at patches of grass and feel the line
Stretch back through generations of the same place,
The same blood,
To feel 'this is my place', and, 'these are my people',
To imagine my grandfather's infancy
In the infancy of an old oak.

No,
Mine is the part of a leaf,
Floating on the traffic air of a city street,
Landing where it will,
Blown on again.

VII.

Ash Wednesday.

A people clothed in rhetoric

Enter another cold Lent.

See our foreheads marked

With the grey daub of sin.

Are our hours of television, videos and queuing

The purgatory of divine retribution,

Do we starve and be frugal for Easter

When we'll taste some sweet egg of reward?

Or

Is Christ two thousand years gone,

Too dead to rise

With the recession of time?

Mammy.

Daddy.

I have been good,

I have said my prayers.

I have kneeled in the pool halls of Ireland

And kissed the ring of the phone.

But there is nothing when I awake.

Each morning,

Nothing.

Then each afternoon,

Nothing.

And at night,

Nothing.

And my hours
Are hours upon hours
That are longer than long.

And I will take,
Take what I must take
To eat and shit.

And I will lose myself,
Lost in the years,
Lost without reason or role.

VIII.

I have seen you Martin,
In the darkness of an uncivil hour,
Rising to the rain.
After a speedy breakfast
You sleepwalk, are pulled,
Automatic on your way
In answer to the call of another day.

Shrill the siren screams, sounding in dead ears
That worked by its noise unprotected for years.

Click goes the card,

From out to in,

And on company time

I exist again.

Am I not lucky,

Isn't it great,

To have a job to start

On the dot of eight.

But

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

*I will be packed and grinded,
Grinded and sorted,
Sorted and packed into an early grave,
As I have been sorted and packed
Into an early marriage.
I live not hand to mouth
But pint to mouth,
And every second day it's bacon and cabbage.*

*Bacon and cabbage,
Bacon and cabbage,
Every second day it's bacon and cabbage.*

And Marie, just twenty-one,
And already in the oven a second bun.
In comes your husband, pissed as be damn,
And soon your in need of a second pram.
He has the money,
He has the cash,
To look smart, place bets, and go on the lash.
Your left at home ready to break,
He gives you nothing but expects food on his plate.

*He's a devout Catholic,
When he found my pills
I spent a week in hospital well near killed.
I swear to god I'll do something drastic,
I want to live before I'm past it.*

Yes,

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

The packing, the grinding, the punching, and sorting.

I will be packed and grinded,

Grinded and sorted,

Sorted and punched into an early grave,

As I have been sorted and packed

Into an early marriage.

I live not hand to mouth

But slap to mouth—

That's why the bastard gets bacon and cabbage.

Bacon and cabbage,

Bacon and cabbage,

That's why the bastard gets bacon and cabbage.

IX.

We have not roamed
In lyric fields
Or bleak bogs of youth,
But crawled curbs
And stalked streets
Of broken continuity.

We have not sworn allegiance
To tri-coloured cloth or
The number thirty-two.
We have not suffered
The hand of tyrannical fathers
Or the collared cane.

There is no taste
Of words newly puked
And words newly swallowed.
There is no hunger in our blood
For any food
Other than nutrition.

X.

What must we do?

We must do nothing.

What do we believe?

We believe nothing.

What must we have?

We must have everything.

What will we do?

We will do nothing.

How do we feel?

We feel apathetic.

What do we care?

We care not a bit.

Where will we go?

We will go nowhere.

What is our vision?

We have no vision.

Where will we lead?

We will lead nowhere.

What is our time?

Our time is gone.

What will be our time?

Our time will not come.

What have we to say?

We have nothing to say.

What is our music?

All and none.

What is our art?

We have no art.

What is our ideology?

We have no ideology.

What is our belief?
We have no belief.

For who do we vote?
We do not vote.

What work do we do?
We do no work.

Have we a lover?
We have no lover.

What is our purpose?
We have no purpose?

What television do we watch?
We watch all television.

Where are our parents?
Our parents are dead.

Where are our children?
They have not been born.

What do we love?
We love nothing.

What is our passion?
We have no passion.

What is our plan?
We have no plan.

Where are our answers?
We have none but these.

How do we feel?
We feel like the last man.

How do we feel?
We feel like the first man.

What must we do?

We must do nothing.

What do we believe?

We believe nothing.

What must we have?

We must have everything.

What will we do?

We will do nothing.

We are the middle men.

We are the middle men.

We are the middle men.

What must we?

What do we?

What must we?

What will we?

What will?

What will?

What will?

What?

XI.

How many more midsummer eves,
In the magic of enduring day,
Through the night, by bonfires on beaches,
Will I intoxicated kiss strangers.
How many more midnight raves will I rage,
Under the pulsing canopy of a clearing,
Stoned fairy-like in the electric light,
Then falling out into the morning.

This bottle gripping palm is foraged with fortune.
Its lines lead through schools and colleges,
To parties near dawn on the other side of town,
From casual bed to bed.

This twenties is not a walk
But a stagger,
Directionless, high on heady spring,
With a scrawled address to a party that will be found on instinct.

*

Before I was led.
As a hand-held boy
This town opened first before me.
From an inland infancy I came,
With cases and furniture and family,
To a coastal town
And the salty expanse of the sea.

Then winter promenade walks.
Well wrapped-up and cloaked
From the thrilling wave crashes
In the dark before bed.

Then pools and rocks
To paddle and climb
And clamber within sight
Or earshot of a parent.

The world was big,
As the sea showed me,
But I had a haven
In a strong and young family.

*

Turning the key on the third attempt,
Then falling into the hall,
Red eyed and burned by dawn.

The still walk home.
Silence, then bird song
Hurting my head,
Like the rattling of milk trucks
Calling workers from bed.

Meeting my father
On his early way out.
Meeting his son,
The drunken lout.

*

But the cocoa of early evenings
Drank childishly fast by the fire.
Herded upstairs under protest—
'I swear to God I'm not tired.'

And a ten minute story
Always heard before bed.
'To sleep, to sleep now,
Sleepy head.'

Tucked in then
To finish with a prayer.
Almost asleep.
The dream of swimming
In a Sea of Faith.

XII.

Brood,

I have wept for your broken hearts.

Brood,

I have cried for the scummy cafes,
Small town chippers, gambling arcades and
Street corner hang-outs of your loneliness.

Brood,

I have woken up in the night's heart,
Sweating and shaking from the nightmare.

Brood,

I have watched helplessly from piers,
Airports, railway stations,
As you dissolved into nothing but dwindling letters
Like the lost tribe that you are.

Brood,

I have heard the hollow plans over pints
Of great novels, amazing un-made movies,
Of teaching English in Prague;
While next year we still sit planning,
Drunk and with bleeding ears.

Brood,

I have seen the puke spill from the mouths
Of the disenchanting,
With their HIV needles and their pills and their hopelessness.

Brood,

I hear you are coming back from Japan,
With sunken eyes, porcelain nerves, with your failure.

Brood,

I have seen the blood in the rain,
The used condoms, the sullied innocence, the loss.

Brood,
You are out again tonight, drinking and yearning
Through the night-clubs for love,
But finding only guilty sex.

Brood,
I read your obituary in the paper,
Was shocked at your last salty journey,
Mermaidless and alone,
Buried neatly, like the final report—
'Self-inflicted death.'

Brood,
Your summer sea cannot be enjoyed,
With its soup of shit and sanitary towels.

Brood,
Stop retching!
Give it up!
Run well like you used.

Brood,
There could be melody as well as monotone,
If your throat wasn't so fucked.

Brood,
Can you hear me?

Brood,
Are you asleep?

Are you dreaming of childhood
When tomorrow promised Christmas?

XIII.

O

But the day
When the Papal keys were crossed
Unfurled and hung
From almost Italian balcony windows
In a nineteen-hundred and seventy-nine Galway
That felt young

And O

It was like Christmas morning
To be woken up early on a special day
When you would ignore tiredness
Expectant
And maybe still dreaming
That Father somebody
Holy or holly
Would be met with a present
Especially for me

O

And the warmth of the milky hot cereal
And steaming tea slurped quickly
And half left in a hurry
To be wrapped in a coat
Handed a deck chair
And hustled and bustled out the door
Like a thousand thousand other holy families
Going on foot to meet their Moses

And O

On to Aunties walking

To meet up and pilgrimage together

In one extended gathering

Of cousins uncles aunts and neighbours

To meet the other eleven tribes

All flooding into the still dark road

With candles and torches and bright things

All Lourdes and Christmas in the pedestrian streets

O

The hellos and the hi's

And the sandwiches and flasks

Shared with joking policemen

Directing the way

And O

Then the light of the day

The dawn

Or is it the sunset

They look so the same

And the crowds waiting

Cheerfully singing

Looking frequently at an empty sky

O

Then a dot

Bigger and bigger

And the hum of a helicopter

And a thousand heads

Hoard of hearts

And it got bigger and bigger

And everyone went

Ah

And O

The songs

The umbrellas

The healing

The hearts

The magic

The joy

The outstretched arms of Uncle

As his eyes grew wet and his moved voice shook

Amen

O

The celebration

The mirth

The beauty and the union of a people

And Ah

And O

And then the words

That struck a chord with a nation

This then is the testimony
Now it is spoken
By the Galway Pope-lovers
Whose hearts have been broken.

Paris—Galway, 1992-1993