**Mother Ireland**

My mother’s mind was a photo album

With stark photos of Kerry Men

And Cork men, eye-caverned men,

Scar-carriers, with slicked-black hair.

Great bruisers, with eyes like beady rats.

Home-leavers, they drank themselves stupid

In cold flats in London with punched-up sofas,

Five o’clock shadows climbing from the skirting.

Married to lips of cracked red crayon,

They mated with migrating Irish birds, blown

Eastward from Ballybrood, the back of beyond.

My mother spawned us, and we sucked

On Eirinn go Brach1. For her, Galway salmon

Were always leaping, every cathedral

Was Connemara marble, and the Eucharist

Turned to blood in your pocket.

In London, the Knights of St Columba

Lured my father from spit-and-sawdust pubs

To their cosy coop. The offertory plate filled up

With his gummed-down religious bribes.

Coal came posted through the wall.

My mother’s sisters, all Bridies,

Bridgets and Bernadettes, barked

Their delayed voices down the phone.

She sang to us of Dublin in the green

Where the helmets glistened in the sun.

She stretched out her arms and dipped us

In the Liffey by our heels. She hectored

Us with her angels, hunted us with her nuns.

Eileen, Helen, Helena, Bunny and Ellen –

All her names and conundrums of herself,

Whimsical, demented, confused, but mother.

Then a hard, fast cancer shook her into death.

P*ó*g mo th*ó*in2 I’ll take the easy way, she said.

This Catholic girl of Shannon and the Aran Isles

In an Essex grave beside a Norman C of E church.

The priest cast his dirt on her coffin,

Like loose change from his pocket of lies.

The stones hit the wood like gun-shot sounds.

Home-leaver, home-maker, home-comer.

1 Ireland for ever

2 Kiss my arse

*by Barry Norris*