

EDITORIAL

Earlier this year there was a particularly inane radio commercial to be heard on RTE radio. A hapless quiz contestant ("Peter") is asked three questions about a car, and answers correctly in each case "Escort CL", whereupon the question-master exclaims "Congratulations Peter, and you have won . . ." "An Escort CL?", "No a lovely book of poetry". And general mirth ensues at the sneering answer. It was one of the more fatuous examples of a generally fatuous genre; the advertising men meeting their public on a denominator that is both common and low. Was it, I wondered, some sort of feeble response to Toyota's successful use of Brendan Kennelly? But Ford has an unhappy history with poetry anyway. Back in the 1950s, Ford of America commissioned the eminent American poet Marianne Moore to come up with a name for their new model. She took the job seriously — and why not? — and came up with a list of some eighty possible names for the Ford marketing men to choose from. None would do, however, and the men from Ford went their own way and came up with the name "Edsel". The car was a flop, legendary in the history of automobiles. Would you buy a second-hand book of poetry from a Ford dealer?

Cars and poetry can mix. Robert Lowell in "Skunk Hour" drives a Tudor Ford; Howard Nemerov has a fine and funny rewriting of "Ozymandias", in which the monument that lasts for ages is a "Coupe de Ville"; e. e. cummings' "she being brand new" is not about a car at all, of course. John Betjeman in "Indoor Games at Newbury" lists the marques of the 1930s — Lagonda, Hupmobile, Delage. From the same age Louis McNeice in his "Ecologue for Christmas" Has an unhappy line about accelerating: "My right leg stretched creating speed". There's an old Citroen in the earlier version of Derek Mahon's "Entropy", but the unsightly wreck has been removed in the revised version in his *Collected Poems*. And of course Paul Muldoon, in his five-line poem, "Ireland" has a Volkswagen gently ticking over and parked in a gap — not in a bog, pace Julie O'Callaghan.

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Aosdána is the nearest we can get to an honours system for our artists, and poets quite rightly include membership of it in their biographical notes. But you don't often see a comprehensive list of members, so here are the poets on the literature panel, as of February 1992:

Leland Bardwell, Sebastian Barry, Dermot Bolger, Philip Casey, Anthony Cronin, Seamus Deane, Paul Durcan, Padraic Fiacc, Patrick Galvin, Robert Greacen, Michael Hartnett, Seamus Heaney, Pearse Hutchinson, James Liddy, Michael Longley, Tom MacIntyre, Derek Mahon, Hugh Maxton, Medbh McGuckian, John Montague, Paul Muldoon, Richard Murphy, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Seán Ó'Coistealbha, Desmond O'Grady, Micheal O'Siadhail, James Simmons, Sydney Bernard Smith, Macdara Woods.

Of the sixty-four on the Literature panel, twenty-nine are poets, and of those twenty-nine only three are women. There are two poets who write in Irish, and another who writes sometimes in Irish, but there are two who used to write in Irish and don't any more. There are some notable absentees, and it seems there's only one Corkman . . . Anyway, there's the list and I leave further analysis of it to our readers.

I went to hear a panel discussion at the Irish Writer's Centre a few weeks ago; Gerald Dawe, Dennis O'Driscoll, Terence Brown and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin were considering the state of Irish poetry today. A recurrent motif through the evening's discussion was a plea for more criticism. I came away with a picture of the masochistic poet crying "Criticism me! Criticism me!" and the sadistic reviewer smiling and saying "Won't. Shan't." Notices are or should be part of the dialogue between poet and reader and so there are eight reviews here, covering eighteen books in all. John F. Deane, speaking as a publisher, suggests in these pages that reviews don't really make much difference. Maybe not in terms of sales — for that one probably should try a radio commercial. It might work for the next issue of Poetry Ireland Review. Perhaps Eddie Jordan would do a voice-over for it. I can imagine it now — 'Formula One poetry, the jacket covered in sponsor's logos, critical articles sorting out the Aosdána list into the slicks and the wets, and all for £4.95 paperback, £7.95 hatchback.'

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