

Galway Advertiser (/galway) / What's On (/galway/entertainment) / Reviews (/galway/entertainment/reviews#48)

# Book Reviews: Robyn Rowland and Elaine Gaston

BY KEVIN HIGGINS Galway Advertiser, Thu, Oct 01, 2015

◀ 95 ◀ 95 ◀ 2 ◀ 2



Robyn Rowland. Photo:- Mike Shaughnessy.

FROM WHAT some would consider inauspicious beginnings, Doire Press has flourished to become a professionally run publisher of quality new fiction and poetry. One of its publications was last year shortlisted for the massively prestigious UK based Forward poetry prize; and Doire is now, quite rightly, in receipt of Arts Council funding.

The Indreabháin based publishing house has issued two new poetry collections - *Line of Drift* by Robyn Rowland and *The Lie of The Land* by Elaine Gaston.

Robyn Rowland is an Australian poet who spends several months of the year in Ireland. She has published a

number of previous collections, though *Line Of Drift* is her first Irish publication. Her work is rich with layered meaning. In 'Burnt Words' she talks about how the bushfires that hit the state of Victoria in 2009 changed the metaphors she uses. Before the fires: "Wind was never useful in a poem,/but flame, now, yes flame was the core..." Afterwards, "Too much ash has fallen;/too many boneless burials./And poems can't undo the burning./That new language of terror,/all the frenzy of flame, has/burned away my tongue."

Listening to Rowland read this poem in Galway recently, it struck me how ludicrously underappreciated her poetry is. Indeed, her work, including this collection, has occasionally been subjected to ignorant critical attack. Some try to make it as poets by relentlessly pleasuring the right people on social media; Rowland prefers to concentrate on what she does best, writing consistently excellent poems. She is a poet acutely alert to history; 'The Long Walk' brings alive the details of the Great Famine in Connacht in a way no contemporary Irish poet has. Rowland's work calls to mind that of Eavan Boland, with a sense of humour added.

Elaine Gaston is a poet at a very different stage in her development, *The Lie Of The Land* being her debut collection. A native of north Antrim, Gaston shares one thing in common with Rowland; she is a poet determined to bring history alive rather than present it as a dead thing from the museum. Her poem 'Living History' is an electrifying attack on that theme. In it, a schoolboy sits as his teacher presents Irish history as "a bone sucked dry", all the time wanting to shout "Excuse me,/would you ever think//of looking out/the window over the city/you can actually see from here/where Henry Joy was hanged..."

Poems such as 'Push-Bike' and 'After Blackberry Picking' call to mind the clipped, word-perfect lyricism of Seamus Heaney's early work. And 'Plastic Bullet' is a fantastically human, political, poem in which the survivor of a stray plastic bullet, fired by the forces of law and respectability, has the last word: "...I've a hole in my boot', I complain./'Sure I've a big hole in my head', she tuts,/an' ye dinny hear me gurn.' Gurn being an Ulster term for whine, or complain. 'My Father Explains The Universe' is another spot on poem in a collection which crackles with rare life and wit.

[Advertiser.ie \(/\)](#) | [Contact \(/contact\)](#) | [Place an Ad \(/advertise\)](#) | [Terms & Conditions \(/terms\)](#) | [Privacy Policy \(/privacy\)](#) | © 2015 Advertiser.ie

Page generated in 0.1317 seconds.