

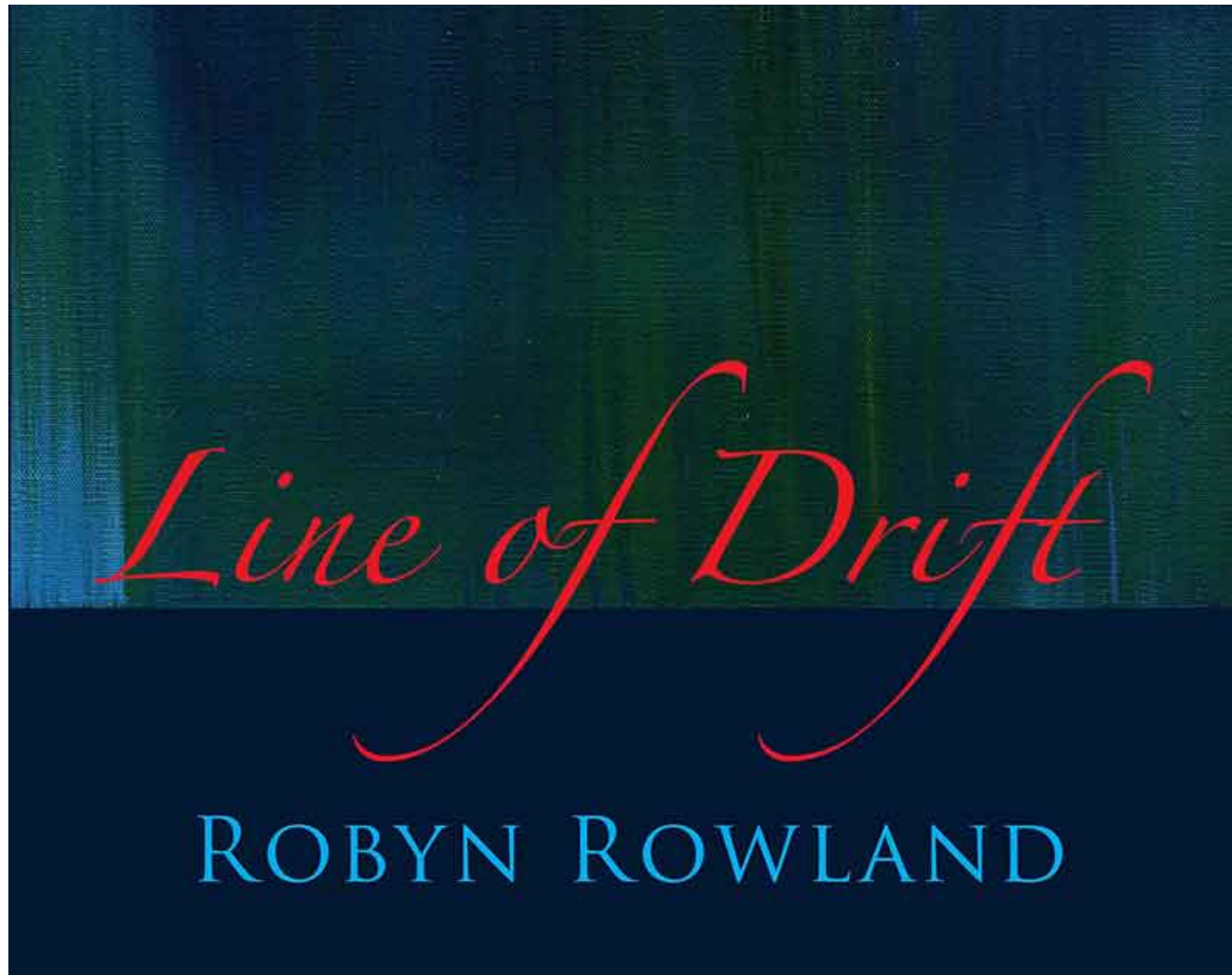


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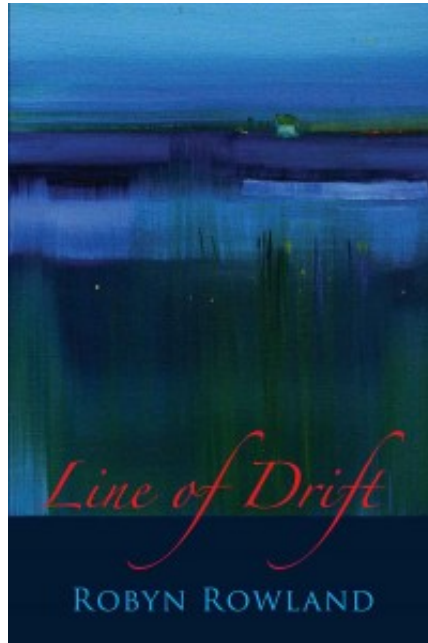
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Posted August 15, 2015 by [Hubert O'Hearn](#) in [Featured](#), [Poetry & Short Stories](#)

LINE OF DRIFT



Line of Drift

by [Robyn Rowland](#)

Published by [Doire Press](#)

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"reality was the courage to get onto a tar and timer curragh and go fishing for your life."

I always feel a rare and whimsical delight when a new collection of poems comes through the letter slot and plops on the hall floor. Oh, any you can tell by the sound what kind of book it is. Poetry plops, novels thud and non-fiction means I have to answer the doorbell and sign for the too fat to fit through envelope with that little plastic stick. That's not the whimsical part.

It's more that in an age when the hideous methods of teaching poetry by schools – dissecting them like formaldehyde frogs – has damn near destroyed the entire art form, knowing that there are still writers who write and publishers who publish poems provides a certain quaint comfort. It's like hearing a lute player busking on Grafton Street or seeing a dragon grazing amidst the cows.

But the esteemed Australian-Irish poet Robyn Rowland is not all about quill pens and damp handshakes. Indeed, she has a rather refreshing objectivity on her art that leads the reader into a museum hall only to present something fresh and new on its walls. For instance, in **Solitude of Friends** Rowland leads us to:

Cathaoir Synge, that stone chair where Synge

wrote out an awe of the place, the people,
is older than before his time,
a collection of rocks placed for a lookout post,
raised by men with barely imagined strength.
We sit inside its solid borders on a damp day,
wind biting and impatient with the light.

And so forth. So there we readers are, imagining ourselves sat there in John Millington Synge's place, wriggling our arses to see if they fit amidst the rocks, feeling brave and noble in enduring such hardship, bold writers to the sea! Then in the next verse Rowland puts all chroniclers, including herself, in perspective:

But reality was the courage to get into a
tar and timber *curragh* and go fishing for your life.
Or bring turf in from Galway on a wild sea,
or the doctor and priest, knowing one
was likely needed with the other.

Oh, so you think you've got it tough as a writer? Well suck it up buttercup, you don't know from tough.

This double perspective of the poet commenting on the observer observing can only be done with subtlety and a certain restraint, else it falls into the trap of being yet another bleat of the unloved poet begging for a hug. Every first-year writing class in every high school or college on earth turns those out by the bucket each semester. So Rowland never plays the trite sympathy card; rather she just points out the anomaly of writers and art tourists attempting to capture what is already there and lets us make our own emotional conclusions about the landscape and its archivists. From **Unbroken Stone in a Stubborn Sea – Epic of Inishbofin**:

A place where poets came to rest from their Darkness,
questing the western light. The madness of Theodore Roethke
burns here, his lovely quotation on the walls of Daly's bar,
long narratives from Richard Murphy arrived, as alive and flowing
as air currents that filled his canvas as he spun around the islands

in his old Galway Hooker 'Ave Maria', sailing a quarrelling
Sylvia Plath with Ted Hughes to Bofin from the Pier Bar in Cleggan.

Really, it's a wonder a working man can ever get a pint what with all these bloody artists clogging up the bar. And yet, there is an implied meeting and fusion here. The landscape or the people who really live in it do not reject the writers or other artists; instead those creatives become a cultural landscape just as valid as the physical. I live in the Northwest of Ireland myself and I am more than well aware that tourists come for the topography, or some of them do. Mostly they come to breathe the air and see the land that Synge saw, or Yeats, or O'Casey. Quantum physics tells us that the act of observation changes the state of the observed. Indeed, it does, for the act of observation can become permanent and invite observation itself.

That distancing and self-awareness also plays out in the meditations Rowland writes about death and the sheer mileage between Connemara and Australia. She alludes to both birthdays or deaths occurring on one calendar day in Ireland and another in Australia. Even such a seemingly mundane fact as what day it is depends on where you are at the moment.

Lastly, I must state my admiration for how beautifully Line of Drift was put together by its publisher, Doire Press. They did not skimp on quality paper and both cover and spine are built to stand up to vigorous reading without cracking. I point this out because it is sadly unexpected in the world of paperback publishing and so it must be encouraged.

These are elegant, strong poems by a master writer. Forget the mess your school made of poetry. You will enjoy Line of Drift.

Be seeing you.

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ABOUT AUTHOR



Hubert O'Hearn

Hubert O'Hearn is the author of six plays and two books, an independent editor and a professional book and music reviewer. Since 2009, he has focused on promoting the work of under-appreciated writers, regardless of genre. 'I admire the fearless,' he says, 'those who write for the audience of one, that being themselves. That's what the great ones all do.' He also enjoys working with new writers as an independent editor and agent and enjoys hearing from them. After having lived most of his life in Canada, he emigrated recently to a quiet village in Ireland. You can contact Hubert

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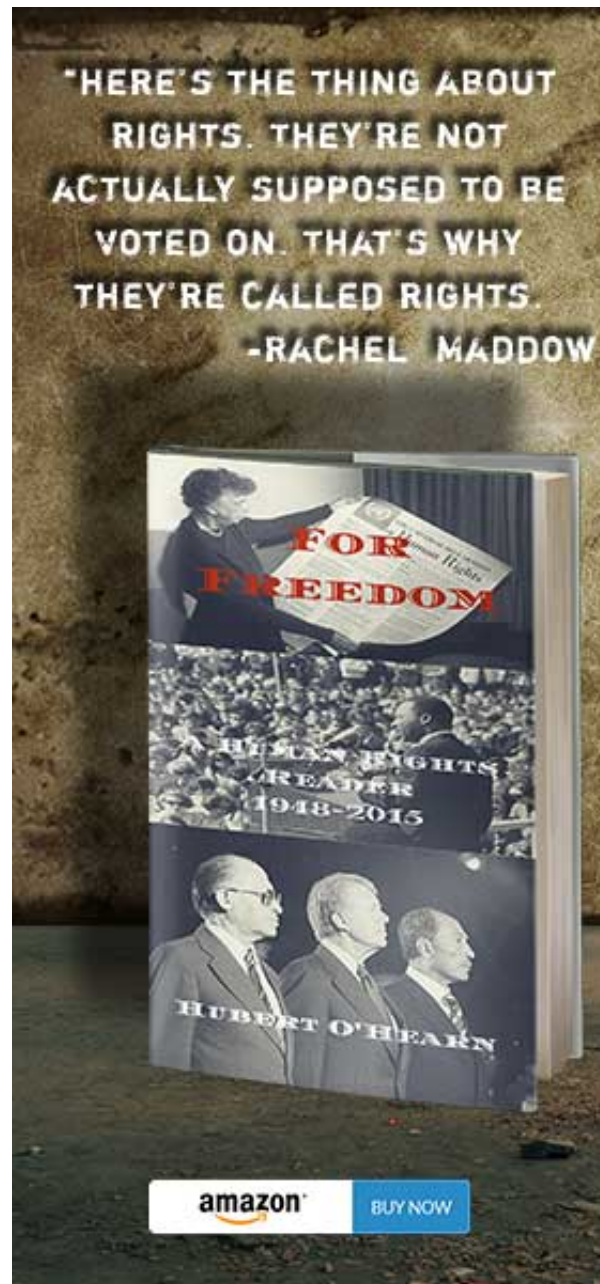




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