Going By Water

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REFERENCES

Michael Coady, *Going By Water*, Gallery Books, 2009, 166 p, ISBN 978 1 85235 485 5 (Hardback), ISBN 978-1-85235-484 8 (Paperback), 20 euros/13.90 euros

- 1 The fact that Michael Coady chose F. Scott Fitzgerald's memorable conclusion to *The Great Gatsby* – "And so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" – as the epigraph for this substantial new collection of poems, not only sets the tone of the book, with its alternate victories and defeats, sorrows and joys, advances and regressions, it also bespeaks the double focus of the volume. Past and present inform one another, prose and poetry alternate provocatively but inexplicably, the written word and photographs either vie for attention or illustrate one another, and Ireland itself is both everyday experience and highly-charged past.
- 2 Like the rivers that thread their way through Coady's native Tipperary and that open and close the volume, and like the cots that carry fishermen, young boys and in "Talitha Cumi" a drowned youth, this volume meanders. Individual poems bear epigrams from Charles Wright, Saint Mark, Derek Mahon, Muriel Rukeyser, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, Eugène Ionesco and Emily Dickinson. Countless poems are written "after" one author or another. Poems on truncated lives and frustrated dreams span two continents and accord the requisite nods to cultural landmarks, chiefly in Paris. This plethora of references seems to be Coady's impassioned tribute to his sources, whether personal, communal or artistic, but the volume suffers from it.
- 3 In a book which moves abruptly between the sentimentalized prose of "Talitha Cumi" and the jive rhythms of "Interview of Main Street," it is difficult to perceive a governing principle. The bawdiness of "Old Flame," addressed to the speaker's "Uncoy Mistress," is certainly worthy of Andrew Marvell, but Wordsworth seems oddly absent from the volume's concluding poem, "Home" in which a "Lesser Celandine" represents

enduring return. One wonders further why Coady numbered the “parts” of the volume (One to Five) and named them as well – *Sister River*, *Tidings*, *Another River*, *Traces* and *All Waters*.

- 4 Still there are fine poems such as “Sunday Afternoon at Anvers-sur-Oise.” Composed entirely of mercurial triplets, it celebrates the passing of time and the constancy of inspiration. Amidst a swirl of cartwheeling children, crows and “a woman – Japanese – with a white parasol against the blaze of sky” van Gogh’s final creative frenzy lives on.