Medbh McGuckian

## THE THANKLESS PATHS TO FREEDOM



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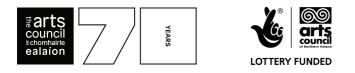
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for Anne Devlin and Carol Tweedle Bardon

## Bishop Street, Without and Within

Spring has come with great difficulty. We stood whole days in a cloud of water since the first days of winter moved in. He is half-dust already.

It was deep into April, the city was soft as a palace of flowers or linden honey. We would have stopped the beating of our hearts if we could.

In a room with a real floor the powers that were spoke for what one might call the Provisional wing. They inhabit an island, and long ago have shed and unlearned

all native marks and notes. Anything alphabetic has a pastness about it *ab ovo*, though we delight in a visitable past, as if the flags meant nothing.

When the train began to move I closed my eyes. It did not stop at any station, but ran on as if it had lost its mind, ran to the side,

then turned and rolled into an open field. So it played its lamp, the disorder of drinking it in deeply,

such a smoky gem, whether it should be prised free. Mary Antrim, the name means receptacle in Italian, tub or vat, but also edge or border, flower border, edge of page. I was as kind to her that evening as I knew how to be,

her head bloodied by a stone. I filled a bowl with berry juice for darkening her shawl, that mystic, chemical change,

as one who has gone over to Rome in attempt to make existence shockproof. Other leaves in the story are Lamb House, where single lady

penfriends hang yearningly about a locked door so thickly besieged a shrine the devoted elderly widow

with her inexhaustible collection of relics. He became supersubtle, deciding to work the garden: but why should he not

slink past in immortality, in the figured tapestry, the long arras that hides him, while the good season lasts?