

class families, represents a move away from the traditional 'big house' trope which had dominated the Irish novel for decades, while his exploration and open discussion of intimate moments between individuals mirrors the sexual revolution that was slowly occurring within Ireland at the time.

Originally published in 1973, this novel avoided official Irish censorship—unlike his first one, *The Pilgrimage*, published in 1961. It went on to sell over 30,000 copies and, as one critic notes, 'In 1973 it was considered a "dirty book" and was as much in demand with my school friends as the infamous Little Red Book of Mao Tse-tung'.

While the romance or 'dirty' aspects of the novel are not new and enact tired, worn-out tropes such as the central love triangle, it is Broderick's wider strokes depicting the larger community around this central plot that are riveting. The views of the local curate, Father Moran, on sex and femininity are at odds with his faith. He sees Marie Fogarty's relaxed attitude towards sex as 'pagan innocence', yet his own 'matter-of fact, slightly brutal' love-making flies in the face of his celibacy. Whilst he engages in a sexual act with Marie, the statue of the Blessed Virgin in her room is always covered, as in doing so he is betraying his faith.

For Marie Fogarty, the daughter of a local businessman, sex acts as an escape from the suffocating surroundings of her community, a society where nothing is ever truly hidden or kept secret. When we first meet her, sex is a method of remembering, of disappearing back towards a nostalgic time in her life. Over the course of the novel, as her relationship with Brian Langley develops and that with Father Moran dissolves, sex becomes a reminder of the restrictions which her community places upon her and their means of destroying her potential happiness.

In Broderick's fictionalised world, those not involved in the act of sex are more concerned with social and moral status. Agnes Fogarty, Marie's mother, opposes the relationship between her daughter and Langley because of the

potential scandals it could provoke. Her relationship with her husband, Pat, disintegrates as their unwillingness to become intimate with each other unfolds. The clandestine social enforcers of the community are the housekeeping pair of Nelly and Miss Price, who provide a truly wonderful macabre humour. Their waiting for the next funeral service in order to attend the burial or to clean the gravestones in an effort to raise their own moral and social status is both humorous and sinister.

The novel's commentary on provincialism in the context of the Irish literary canon is fascinating. Broderick is attempting to depict the final deathblow to the 'big house' culture rooted in the Irish literary lexicon. This deathblow is dealt by the rising Catholic middle class, who wish for newly constructed modern homes instead of inheriting their parents' estates. The final confrontation between Agnes and Marie Fogarty offers a paradigmatic shift of power away from the older generation to those like Marie who wish to live in new homes, built for a more egalitarian social existence. It is this same trading of the 'big house' for the housing estate that sees the death of the all-knowing, all-hearing housemaids, replaced by looking out at neighbours through one's window.

Though described as a 'dirty' book upon its publication, today the 'dirty' aspects will evoke non-reaction or laughter from readers. Broderick should be admired, however, in the context of the book's conception for tackling the myth of saintly, asexual priests. Fr Moran is an aloof misogynist yet his sexual escapades reveal a vulnerable figure.

Sadly, what damages the literary qualities of Broderick's work is his unwillingness to separate the action of the novel from his own didactic deductions, particularly his opinions of women. Moments of intimacy are, sadly, firmly viewed through the male gaze. Marie, who operates as one of our main protagonists, is never given the emotional depth that is needed, particularly in the latter parts of the novel, to fully explore her character.

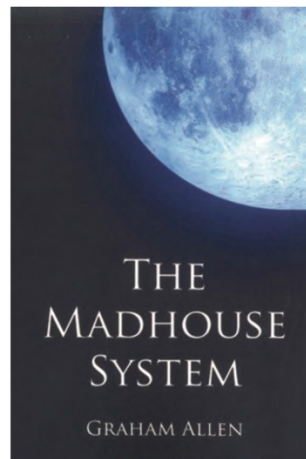
Despite the novel's imperfections—its misogynistic aspects and didactic passages—which detract from its narrative, the strength of its social commentary and its satire of 1970s Catholic Ireland in microcosm are what keep the reader engaged throughout.

Matthew Farrelly

Poetry

The Madhouse System. Graham Allen. *New Binary Press*; 78pp; €12 pb; 21cm; 978-0-9935803-1-4.

Poems that successfully collide with the real, insane world



You have to take a poetry collection out and about to review it. There is no point sitting underneath the trees of that orchard suffusing your mind with loveliness. There is no point sitting in your favourite armchair beneath the delicate lighting. What kind of a test is that? Poetry has to be taken onto public transport or into a fast food joint. It is to be put beneath strip lights while you sit on a plastic chair. It is to be taken out into the world with all its failings and listened to there. It is to be given a bit of a kicking. Otherwise everything gets a little too cosy and poetry is lost in mist-soaked landscapes or yet another poet is giving domestic animals a symbolism that the world could really do without.

In other words, *The Madhouse System* needed to be taken out into the

madhouse system. Graham Allen is, by way of introduction, one of the more interesting poets around at the moment. He is, for instance, not interested in overwhelming us with his profile-building abilities yet uses technology for far more interesting concerns. His one-line-per-day electronic poem *Holes* has been running for a remarkable ten years and shows that technology can be good for you. If the blunt instrument that is Twitter leaves you cold, try the succinct brevity of *Holes* as an antidote.

With *The Madhouse System* itself, Allen begins with two poems that have happily, or unhappily, collided with the world in a way art often aims for and often misses. Take, for instance, this from 'Spoiler Alert':

everyone that had access
to the seventeen digit
closely encrypted emergency security code
released their weapons.

Or these lines from 'Sydney Park, Spring 2015':

if not from scratch, then still, somehow
we are going to have to start over again.

They feel like, and are going to feel like, they have been written on any afternoon in the foreseeable future. Not that Allen makes the mistake of insisting on poetry's instant relevance, for what is relevant today is not necessarily so tomorrow. There is more to Allen's work than that, and he is in many ways a complex poet, casting off not the easy lines but lines that tug at you and need to be reread and toyed with. For complex, though, do not read abstruse. Allen delves into the personal with such moving poems as 'Branches and the Art of Gardening', with these powerful opening lines:

because I am your son I have kept this
place inside me,
like a face I never knew how to put on

or the advice to a son to find:

somewhere you can invite the world to
visit,

somewhere you can call your home.

He is a poet of memorable craft. In 'The Tour of Acceptance, Letters from an Irish Poetry Publisher and Celtic Twilight', he is funny too, in a way so little poetry intentionally is.

I did think that the over-literary references might annoy me, as they often do, with Blake, the Shelleys, the *Odyssey* all getting a shout-out. This is often a display of cleverness in which the poet seeks to show off rather than anything else. It acts as barbed wire, keeping out the less well read. I will let Allen off the hook, though. He wears his learning lightly, which is the mark of genuine knowledge rather than literary arrogance. I did not come away, as I have done with other collections, feeling distinctly out-Greeked or feeling that my lifelong reading was inadequate. But that is way too much about me anyway. A review of Graham Allen should make a point of saying that with this second collection we are once again reading one of Ireland's most intriguing and, I would say, enduring poets. Do not miss him.

Writing from within the Madhouse System that we all inhabit, we all work in and love in, out and about in those dingy, soulless cafes, Graham Allen has written here a poetry bravely outside the regular confines of Irish poetry; and, in its insistence on being simply poetry first and foremost, it is all the more refreshing for that. Yeah, great stuff, and you should do what not enough reviews tell you to do: you should go out and buy a copy of the book.

Joseph Horgan

1916 Rising

Through the Barricades. Denise Deegan. *CreateSpace*; 372pp; £12.99 pb; 22cm; 978-1540695666.

A tricky genre

'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,' says Stephen Dedalus in one of the early chapters of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Since Stephen is the prototype of



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