

Map to Homes

Honor Molloy

Artist's Statement

There really is a map. I found it when I was cleaning out my father's Berkeley Studio just after he died. In among his birth certificate and his pension card was a photocopied map: Dublin blocked out in thin black lines. He had drawn three stars upon it in blue ink. One star at the South Anne Street house where he was born and reared from 1929 until 1943. Another at Eleven Ely Place where, from 1963 to 1969, he was married to my mother and the father to six kids. The last star is on 59 Pembroke Row where he'd lived in a dilapidated Georgian with his second family from 1975 to 1978. The buildings are not far from each other. Pembroke Row is round the corner from Ely Place, is a ten minute walk to South Anne Street where the merchant class dwelt above their shops when he was a boy.

For fifty years, my father had resided in all the dirty corners of Dublin, in dozens of flats, squats, kips. If he'd marked every place he'd dossed down in, this map would be riddled with stars.

Why these three places, these three stars? It's the saddest thing I've ever seen, communicating so much in its simplicity. These were sites he cared for, that held stories, that were homes. He'd marked these particular dwellings to think on. To run the old days through his mind. He could leap into his map, take an imaginary stroll along Dublin streets, pop in and out of kitchens, visiting his families, visiting himself at different points in time.

This star map changed me utterly.

A third generation theatre-maker, **Honor Molloy** was born in Dublin, Ireland. She has spent a large part of her writing and performing life chasing her father in the dark — trying to figure out who he was. The son of a Music Hall clown, John Molloy appears in one form or another in her dramatic work: *Molloy*, *Murphy*, *Me the Howlin*, *Crackskull Row*, *In Pigeon House*, *What's Taken* and in her novel *Smarty Girl: Dublin Savage*. Her father was a comedian who performed on Raidió Teilifís Éireann, in films and original revues, and in Beckett plays. A beloved Irish actor, he moved to Berkeley in 1981. He presented rambling performance art in nontraditional venues in the city, such as the Bingo Hall at the back of St. Joseph the Worker round the corner from his studio apartment. He died in 1999 in an Oakland hospital.

When I look at any map of Dublin today, I look for his stars.
I look for my father's homes.

Map to Homes

Once upon a time in California, a man gave my father a photocopied map of Dublin. Black and white. My father had a longing for it, do you see. And though he'd never return there, Dublin was vivid in his mind throughout his last years.

September. It was September. What year? Jesus knows. Certainly not me. I don't. Member the year now. There's part of me won't let me know the year. Year-the-year he went gaga, Molloy. For that's what we, the family, call him. Molloy.

Molloy made his filth in the theater. And his father before rattled the boards round Victoria's globe. They made their living from stories and mirth, music and play.

But the year-what-year? Year he flogged himself with the knife. Kifed himself and was gone from this world. I flew out to Berkeley to clean. And clear his studio apartment so the landlord could rent it to another poor sod. Walking the long-long blocks along University Ave. What would I find in his emptied home? What would I find in his empty.

Chipped saucers, adult diapers, photos of his children, all nine. Six from one marriage. Three from the afters. I'm the third of six chisseler flung up, wrung up, and strung up down a damp lane at the rear of a Georgian on Ely Place. A converted stable he called a mews. Fireplace of sparkelling granite stone, lino, the piano, and *sugain* chairs. The Dublin Bay prawns when our ship was in. Gruel-y porridge when out to sea. Most days, Molloy was gone from us, off on a tramp adown a road.

Just a few steps into his Berkeley studio, behind two French-looking doors came down a Murphy bed, stripey mattress mapped in meanders of blood.

I felt no shock. I felt no. Hadn't seen the man in an age.

It's just gone September, Nineteen Hundred and summat-the-summat. I'm here in his studio, rubber gloved. Scrubbing his blood off the baseboards, the walls. Up to the elbows in my da. I scour that room. For he'd the one room only. Toilet. Kitchenette with gas range. The sole window, a skylight, above the Murphy Bed, from which to steer about the stars.

Done cleaning, I take anything-of-value: actor headshots; few books; production snaps; a hat, with the fag tucked neatly into the hatband; his scripts from the mad daze, life spooling into spent. Him mad on the bed, body and mind all out. Him. After fifty years working in theatre. No longer able for the acting. Fifty years reduced to what I'd scavenged and popped in one suitcase. There are audio tapes in there. Videos of his shows. Letters from his kids scattered about

the earth. And his boys. He had three bastarding boys. The second family. Demanding attention. Wanting him to be their father.

Dear —

I don't know what to call you. Hardly daddy.

I am the last child, Mister Nine. I've been well-and-forever missing our squat on Pembroke Row and my mashed bananas. In milk.

I've but the one memory only. You in the bed. All the time in the bed. You sad in the bed. Sleeping all your days adaze. Sleeping, since there was no work hackting. Once I was sick, or was it you-sick? We ate together in the bed. Squashed bananas in milk on Johnston, Mooney & O'Brien bread. Two slices with the ban-bans squashed twee-Behan. Two slices: slice next to the end of the loaf and the heel. Last of the lot, like me.

That milky bang-bang sangitch is all. But-then — In that membering there's this. Few years later:

You flinging the mither off the balcony in Ballymun Flats. You heaving her up-over the iron balustrade. Intent on tossing her to the tarmac. You screaming. Her clutching the suit jacket you pinched off the rack at Oxfam.

O-she, the mither, went at you. And you raging.

But these days now, it's these days now I've been meaning to tell youse. Your dear Dirty Dublin is being torn asundered. And me. Down to this. Busking for rusks, a crust. Me-busking this demolition site. 26 South Anne Street. Where you was born. Breeched to the bed of your mother. Blathered your way into the whirls. Splathered out, all bloods on the feather bed. Above the shop: Dick Molloy's Dairy. Dick. His bread and butter was milks and cream.

— Signed, Mister Nine

See. Molloy lives in a box, a square of light on stage. He lives tween blue lines on sheets of paper, in snapshots held flat on my hand, in flicks flicka-flicks of celluloiding. He doesn't live in the really world. That man in the box is my father. Father of streets, father of roads streaming. Father of dreams, father is

me, dreaming. Me dreaming his dream, dreaming his own da's dream beyond. Till I'm the dream of my father's dream of his daddo's dream long gone.

I step into his suitcase. Drop through time, through to into him. Inside. His every mothered half-thought:

*Cause the one time now, do you know the way, like?
There he'd be, waiting for me in the dark. And I a
young fella only. He'd erupt. Blind me, blunt me.
Put his fist in me. Mouth, me — Look me in the eye before
he swings the boot, before — Kickin me arse bloody.
I take the blows, keep quiet.*

*“Ah, gis us a kiss, me-son.”
Boy on bed. Daddy in bed. A boy. Back-there in time.
“Here's a sucky sweet.” He's —*

*But-no, I'm after tellin a lie. This happened me more
'n once, more than — Over and over, over the years.*

*Just one demon in the hall of langers. Him. Thrust down
me throat along with the Krystian brudder's mickey.
Soil-hold, I am.*

*Was robbed. Robbed of any happiness all them
year ago. Had to git, or I'd-a — Was gonna scald him,
burn down the house.*

*So to come outta that and not go to jail is —
I would say, is —*

*It was a way in, though. To show business in me
broke shoes. Pack up, I'm off and awayyy. With a
toothbrush in me pocket. Going the roads.
For life.*

But.

*He's there, still there. Still-still. In his him. In his
still-still-still.*

Who am I? Who?

Molloy, I thought, but said: Daddy.

*I'm leaking-leaking-leaking, I'm — Under my going-days, I'm —
Pseudo-suicidal. And the rivery little cunder-urrents, mind full
of it, this falling down, this falling. My brain is muck these nows.*

*Turn the backwards clock. Face gainst the wall. And the
tickings' ticking in the slappy kitchen. The punchy
parlor. Even the stairs. Can't escape them rooms.
Calling me back through time. Come on. Home.*

*There. In a box of room. Nowhere to go but the bed.
Site of me own father's going. Father's groping.
Place I was born. There on the bed. South Anne Street.
Mother was Anne of South Anne Street. South Anne's South,
her — Street.*

*See. See-see. See-seeeee. Want to tell the story of
my father, want to tell on my father. Want to —*

*What was done on me.
In the bed of my father.
He bit me, fucked me, split me.*

*From the skylight, a box of light cast on the
Murphy bed. Box of life. Box of bed. Tucked into
beddy-house, riddled with worry about every thing.
If it's life I'm watching, I don't belong in it. I don't
belong inside my own laughing.*

I have been — I have-am dis-mentalled.

*And in the night my father comes to me.
And in the night, he comes.*

*Above-above my sky-lit studio, all the fucked stars stop
to wink at me. They say, they say, "life's little joke is . . .
you're nothing. Molloy-Molloy, life's little joke . . ."*

Is me.

Let me cut free for once, let me cut —

Upon a time in California, a man photocopied a map of Dublin for my dad. Black and white. Found in this suitcase. Hold it here, I hold it. My father's Dublin in my hands. Upon the streets, upon the roads, he drew three stars in blue-blue ink. Three stars to mark the homes he lived in once. Ely Place. Pembroke Row. South Anne. Not one theatre, but:

Three homes. Three Homes. Three —



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