

“The improvisation inspired by the setting, and the bravery of the alternate counterpoint between what is most life-giving and what is most atrocious, bears witness to O’Siadhail’s poetic vocation.”

WHEN writing *Gossamer Wall* (2002), O’Siadhail felt the need for a deep form of respect, appropriate to the momentousness of the subject. There is no “I” in any of these poems. They are broadly arranged in five movements, with the central one a series of sonnets. In this section, the theme of isolation is palpable. In “Here”, he writes:

Each for himself. Father steals
from son.
Parched but denied an icicle Levi
asks why?
There’s no why here.

O’Siadhail’s poetry is known for its refined and deliberate use of form — both classical and improvised. So, why the sonnet in this case? “I used an elegant form to critique those who separated the virtues of beauty, truth, and goodness,” he says. “For those perpetrators, they could do hellishly evil acts, and yet enjoy music”.

In “Never”, he questions poetry

after Auschwitz. He seeks to bear witness to “the restless subversive ragtime of what thrives”; he talks of “the criss-cross of flourishings,” and proposes that, in music, “we feast to keep our promise of never again.”

The final section of *Gossamer Wall* — the part that caused him most anxiety — is named “Prisoners of Hope”. “It was a worrying thing, and perhaps one of the more difficult things, to turn attention to hope at the end of the *Gossamer Wall* collection. I didn’t want to appear trivial. But I have always had a celebratory note in my poetry. Hell can’t have the last word.

“Why hope? If hope doesn’t have the last word, then hell wins. Hope is a wager on meaning. Hope is not optimism. I think that ‘all manner of things will be well’ is hard won. Hope is grounded in reality, but it still has light.”

IT IS impossible to read *The Collected Poems*, especially the “Love Life” poems, away from the shadow of his recent bereavement. Bríd O’Siadhail died in June 2013. In the introduction, O’Siadhail writes: “As I write I am coping with the most difficult circumstances in my life so far.” Theirs was a love of longevity, intimacy, sensuality, and words.

“I don’t think we could have been any closer,” he tells me. “The loss I am experiencing now is, in many ways, unspeakable. . . I never met anybody with the same ability to love as Bríd. The price of love is parting. With this, too, must come gratitude and grieving.”

He pronounces her name with care — in “Name Dropping”, he recalls how he often steers conversation so that he can say her name:

How even in your absence I
conjure you.

The poem “Guests” is a joyous and generous celebration of the “mischief and fun” at the heart of welcoming guests at their Dublin home. “Love, of its nature, has overflow, and this overflow is hospitality,” he says. “Being in love allowed each of us to become more ourselves, and in the trust and security that came from this, we found expression in hospitality.”

In “Matins for You”, he writes of her:

even as a girl you’d known your
dream would be
Bringing others’ dreams about.
This once I think I glimpsed you,
You my glistening, lonely, giving
Mistress Zen.
Thank you. Thank you for so
many dreams come true.”

λογος — Logos
From *Tongues*

In the fourth Gospel logos is the word
That was in the beginning and made flesh
With Yahweh’s millennia of pledges
Echoing in one noun for “what is said”,

But laden too with Greek philosophies
Commingling with logic and -ologies,
Rules, laws, argument, reason, measure, worth,
And even for Plato bird of the soul,

So
From *Tongues*

The final poem in the collection is “So” — a haiku with echoes of the book of Genesis and the Gospel of John. He stays with the Japanese convention that the final five syllables of a haiku must refer to

Although its root had only meant “to pluck”
Or “gather” and then “to read together”,
“To tell”, “to speak”, and so to “the thing said”
Which in turn takes on a life of its own.

Conjure believers reading papyrus
Wondering at a prologue’s parallels:
The same was in the beginning with God.
In a word, all and everything that is.

nature, and ends the collection with five syllables of life and hope.

In the beginning
The word. So too in the end.
Birds of Paradise.

He uses the word “lonely” because “Bríd had a loneliness for God, a longing for God. I respected this. Close as we were — and I can’t imagine that we could have been closer: we shared almost every thought for 44 years — the mystery of otherness is always there.

“The Irish word *uaigneach* carries with it more than the term ‘loneliness’; longing, loneliness and alone-ness are all together in it.

People ask if, in the grief of losing Bríd, I am finding consolation in faith, and the answer is that I am not. Rather, I find a challenge. It is a challenge to see the person I love the most go into a deep grave, and to still wager on meaning.

Collected Poems by Micheal O’Siadhail is published by Bloodaxe Books at £20 (Church Times Bookshop £18).

Never
from *The Gossamer Wall*

That any poem after Auschwitz is obscene?
Covenants of silence so broken between us
Can we still promise or trust what we mean?

Even in the dark of earth, seeds will swell.
All the inter weavings and fullness of being,
Nothing less may inure against our hell.

A black sun only shines out of a vacuum.
Cold narrowings and idols of blood and soil.
All the more now, we can’t sing dumb!

A conversation so rich it knows it never arrives
Or forecloses; in a buzz and cross-ruff of polity
The restless subversive ragtime of what thrives.

Endless dialogues. The criss-cross of flourishings.
Again and over again our complex yes.
A raucous glory and the whole jazz of things.

The sudden riffs of surprise beyond our ken;
Out of control, a music’s brimming let-go.
We feast to keep our promise of never again.



Loved and lost: portrait of the poet’s late wife, Bríd O’Siadhail

Name-dropping
From *Love Life*

Do friends notice when often by design
I somehow steer the conversation around

So casually to seem to drop your name,
The once-tapped r and long ee sound,

Charge of a consonant and vowel spliced,

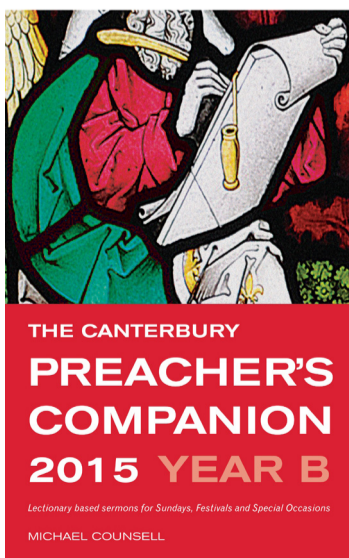
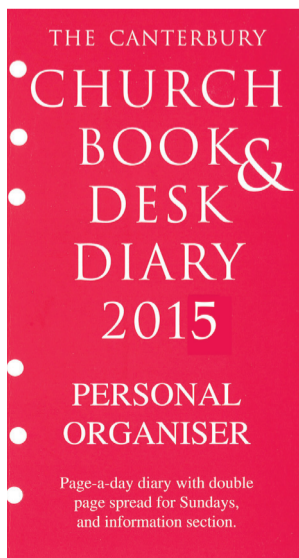
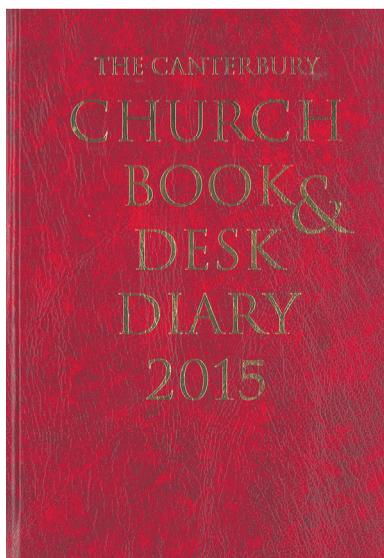
Slipping you in like a hidden billet-doux

As though apart I need to stake my claim
On this lovely incantation of your Geist?

How even in your absence I conjure you.

I’ve called you by name. You are mine.

Three into ONE for ADVERTISERS . . .



We are now booking advertising space in these renowned publications. You can choose to appear in just one, two, or all three. There is a special offer for space booked in all three.

The Church Book & Desk Diary 2015 needs no introduction. It is the most respected and well-loved of all the diaries. A page-a-day format with two pages for Sundays; daily offices, key contacts, and a host of other features. Regular advertisers will know all about it.

The Personal Organiser 2015 is the younger sister to the *Desk Diary*. Now in its fifth year, it has established a new market all of its own. Most advertisers wish to be in both publications.

The Canterbury Preacher’s Companion 2015 (formerly Church Pulpit Year Book) contains sermons for Sundays, Holy Days, Festivals and Special Occasions, and now has ideas for family-friendly services, too. Regular advertisers will need no further incentive.

All three books are hugely popular with both parish priests and Readers. The *Desk Diary* also reaches a wider audience.

Together they make a powerful advertising platform.

Pages in everything are just £396+ VAT; half pages just £252 + VAT

For more information contact us:

Stephen Dutton or Sue Keighley, *Church Times*, 3rd Floor, Invicta House, 108-114 Golden Lane, London EC1Y 0TG

Tel. 020 7776 1011 email: stephen@churchtimes.co.uk