

THE USE OF MEMORY: MICHAEL COADY'S *ALL SOULS*

by Eamonn Wall

Published in 1997, *All Souls*, Michael Coady's third collection of poetry, was one of that year's best received volumes of new work. It is a rich, varied, eclectic, and inspired compendium that incorporates poetry, story, illustration and memoir to reflect the interlocking and overlapping territories of peoples and places and time and memory across Ireland and America. The work is ambitious in scope, theme, and design, embracing poetic and colloquial voices, the Irish and English languages, the often painful experiences of the Irish diaspora, and the residual experiences of loss felt by those who remained in Ireland. *All Souls* is also an exploration of the poet's family history, which thematically and emotionally frames the work, and it is shaped, though hardly bordered, by Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary, where Coady has lived his own life as writer and teacher, and by the experiences of the emigrant Coadys in the United States. *All Souls* is a literary work of the highest order, an individual act of recovery of family history and, on a larger level, a representation of the pained mechanics of exile. In modern Irish poetry, the works it most closely resembles are John Montague's *The Dead Kingdom* and Ciaran Carson's *Belfast Confetti*, both formally ambitious poetic expressions of history and place though *All Souls*, in its odyssey of styles, can perhaps be best compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses*. However, of the Irish poets of his own generation, Coady is thematically closest to Eavan Boland, a writer who, in both her poetry and prose, has made the diaspora a central platform of her work.

Writing of *All Souls*, Ciaran Carson notes that it "is a compendium of the implications of that family history, written like a symphony... Few books like *All Souls* are being written these days, but I would like to think that such a book could only have come out of Ireland: it unites the demotic and the sophisticated; it speaks through the mouths of people, and encompasses all kinds of art. Society and destiny shape us, but we shape them" (30-31). Theo Dorgan writes that "in his new collection Michael Coady stands quietly but firmly before us as a man gifted with true humility, committed to the stringent duties of memory, memorialist to a place and to a people. It is a remarkably human and unillusioned book, a work of scruple and playfulness, astringent, elegiac and true" (3). In the *Irish Times*, Caitriona O'Reilly noted that *All Souls* defies accurate classification and "comprises biographical prose, epigram, lyric verse, and translations from the Irish, all executed with considerable generosity and vivacity... [and] charged with feeling and vivid detail while skillfully avoiding sentiment or nostalgia" (6).

Looking back over Coady's published work, it is clear that *All Souls* is also a work of artistic culmination where recovery is brought into sharper focus and where themes that had once been explored in short lyrics are now developed on a larger scale, and in a variety of forms. In his first collection, *Two for a Woman, Three for a Man*, which received the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 1979, many poems explore the ordinariness of small town life in Carrick-on-Suir with particular reference to individuals whose time on earth has not been recorded, neither in history nor literature. In the title poem, the poet's brother, who is an emigrant and part of a class, in Coady's view, that has been written out of history, is

quoted at their father's funeral:

When the bell boomed three  
 over my father's coffin  
 my emigrant brother pale  
 above his black tie shuddered  
*I couldn't live  
 under that sound.* (20)

In "Still Life from a Hill over a Town," the famine dead are recalled from history by the eerie specter of a key hanging on the wall of the poet's study:

My wife and child are in a house  
 Out on the edge of the frame;  
 The key of the Workhouse which once  
 Stood on the site  
 Hangs on the wall of my study. (23)

In this early poem, we are presented with an insight into Coady's *ars poetica*. The speaker is looking down over Carrick-on-Suir from a nearby hill composing a photograph in the viewer before pressing the shutter. In addition to presenting the physical complexity of the town and the river where "Boys are fishing from a bridge/Built before Columbus raised a sail," the photograph, because houses, shops, and streets are repositories of the worlds of the living and dead, will contain resonant echoes of an unseen world that throbs within the frame's complex interior:

Things I can't see are happening now  
 Because they've always happened.

An old man is dying,  
 Girls are dressing for a wedding,  
 A coffin is being prepared.

Under some roof  
 A man and woman  
 Are making love. (23)

Poetry, for Coady, must be equally in touch with present and past time, with town and country, with hill and street, with the river and the sea into which it flows, and with the living voices of now and those that whisper back across centuries. For both Coady and Joyce, the town and city are both the microcosms of the world, and the world itself. Though just thirty-two lines, "Still Life from a Hill over a Town," is an ambitious and widely ranging poem and one that anticipates *All Souls*, published seventeen years later. Furthermore, throughout the period he has published poetry, Coady has also shown his photographs, both inside and on the covers of his books, and it is clear that the process of composition moves fluidly from one

art form to the next: one influences the other and vice versa. The best examples of Coady's photographs are to be found in *Full Tide*, a miscellany of prose articles, originally published in the Clonmel *Nationalist* for the most part, which appeared in 1999. These photographs record aspects of Carrick's public life—boys and men fishing on the Suir, and the town's religious statuary—though Coady also includes the work of other photographers in *Full Tide* and a variety of visual images—a movie poster, sheet music, for example—to indicate his desire to have his published work contain the three primary artistic activities of his life: poetry, photography, and the music he has played and performed in public since childhood. Coady's use of collage in *Full Tide* and *All Souls* is one of the most important exercises of this kind by an Irish poet in recent times and comparable to John Montague's similar usage in *The Rough Field*. For both poets, the visual image, whether woodcut or photograph, or even the page's white space, is inseparable from the printed words of the poem.

In addition to marking out the road ahead, Coady's early work suggests a thematic kinship with the work of Eavan Boland, another poet concerned with mapping the lives of those erased from the narrative of history. Both poets reach backward into history from the known present to seek the silenced voices of the past, and both use family history as their method of entry. In his first collection, Coady is connected to emigration by the presence of his "pale brother" at their father's funeral (20). Boland's experience is first-hand when she is wrenched from Dublin as a child, and brought to live in London:

Long ago  
I was a child in a strange country:

I was Irish in England.

I learned  
a second language there  
which has stood me in good stead:

The lingua franca of a lost land. (32)

It is a measure of Coady's capacity for empathy that he is able to so fully bring to life the emigrant experience in his work. His only recorded personal experience of emigration is found in "Dreamland," an essay which details a summer of work in England when he was a student:

I was a relatively innocent and shy young man never before out of Ireland. The loneliness of my first few weeks took me totally by surprise. I was ambushed by that unconsidered and unspoken thirst for the familiar and the ordinary that we call homesickness. Any Irish accent overheard on the street was refreshment and reassurance: a saving straw to clutch at. (*Full Tide* 67)

Coincidentally, both Coady and Boland are connected by Tipperary workhouses: the key of the old Carrick-on-Suir workhouse hangs on the wall of Coady's study while Boland, in her search through family history, locates her great-grandfather in the 1870s when he became master of the Clonmel Union (the workhouse's official title), situated a few miles

upstream on the Suir from Carrick. In Coady's and in Boland's hands, as Daniel Tobin has pointed out, "genealogy becomes a compelling tool of the imagination" (42). Equally, their work, though very often very different in manner and enthusiasms, reaches back in time, to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in particular, to recover the forgotten, desperate, starving, and diseased: the Irish who became lost.

At the beginning of *Oven Lane*, his second collection, Coady proclaims that he loves "the abandon of abandoned things," a statement that sets the intent if not the tone of the collection ("Letting Go" 11). This phrase recalls the work of Derek Mahon, another poet enthralled by forsaken places and objects, though whereas for Mahon, in such poems as "A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford," these explorations are philosophical in intent and, ultimately explorations of disjunction, for Coady they are familial and modes of binding. Coady comes to the past to record the facts and the spirits of his own ancestry, his most tangible knot to history:

A hundred years and I will come  
to try the lane for echoes

the coughing and the crying  
of children in the dark,  
the nameless incarnations  
of love and grief and hunger  
where the river flows  
coldly past. ("The Letter" 27)

Other poems in *Oven Lane*, literally the lane in Carrick leading to the river where generations of Coadys were raised, also look forward to *All Souls*. "The Letter" presents the central narrative of *All Souls* in miniature: a poem in five sections rather than a book-length poetic symphony, and which will be reprinted as the opening to the seventh section of *All Souls*. In addition, Coady includes work that records time visiting the Eastern United States, his interest in developing ties with his relatives there, and his sense of kinship with the dead American Coadys, such as the Uncle Jim he had heard about but never met:

In Easthampton cemetery  
I breathe for him a litany  
of distant names of places  
only he and I would know. ("The Pursuit of Happiness" 63)

In addition to many poems of observation of Carrick life, linking the volume to *Two for a Woman*, *Three for a Man*, Coady includes "Stopping by a Clare Graveyard After Hours," his formal elegy to the famous Clare musician, and his great friend, Pakie Russell. Pakie and Micho Russell embody the connectedness that Coady finds essential to art:

I know you were always a man  
with a heart for the true thing,  
For a child or a saying, a woman,



a flower or a song,  
Life that came dancing through fingers  
was most of your praying  
And your darkness redeemed in the shape  
and surprise of the word. (37)

In the stanza's hierarchy, contact with people precedes the creation of art. It is out of such intense contacts, allied with the free interplay between the physical landscape and the poet, and even with the dialogue between the living and dead, that true music and true poetry is made. To play music, dance, and write poetry are activities as natural to humans as breathing:

The tiding old sea is still taking  
and giving and shaping,  
Gentians and violets break  
in the spring from the stone,  
The world and its mother go reeling  
and jigging forever  
In answer to something that troubles  
the blood and the bone. (37)

Coady further recounts his relationship with the Russells in *The Well of Spring Water*, a prose work from 1996. In addition to immersing him in traditional music, the brothers introduced Coady to the vibrant oral culture of North Clare, and reminded him of how songs and tunes are in continuous states of transmission and transformation as they pass from singer to singer and musician to musician. Each new version incorporates elements left by each singer and player, even if the performer is someone from outside the locale or tradition:

The process of voluntary exploration and reconnection with the ancestral music tradition need not imply any kind of exclusivist stance. Different musical idioms should be able to co-exist in a context of mutually enriching esteem. (11)

Each contribution, if its intent is honest, is valuable. In Doolin and its environs, Coady can easily locate the vibrant Gaelic culture that has, over time, been layered beneath the surface in South Tipperary. Explicit in North Clare and less so in Carrick is collage: culture and its composite elements as formed by disparate and often opposing forces—the Irish and the English languages or traditional music and brass band music, for example—and this is Coady's favored method of composition in *All Souls*. Finally, nothing represents dispossession as well as traditional music, and the literary music of the dispossessed are at the heart of *All Souls*.

The best explanation of Coady's purpose in *All Souls*, outside of the work itself, is provided in an essay he wrote for the 1995 *Migration and Emigration* issue of *Poetry Ireland*. He cites some of the classics of diaspora writing—Brian Friel's *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, Donall Mac Amhlaigh's *Dialan Deoraí*, Mici Mac Gabhann's *Rota Mór an tSaoil*, Charles

Fanning's *The Irish Voice in America*, and the Albany novels of William Kennedy—and provides two commentaries on his interest in the Irish in America, both of which are central to *All Souls*. The first introduces the family narrative:

In the 1880s my great-grandfather, an impoverished boatman on the Suir, left for America following the death of his wife in childbirth. He left his one surviving child behind in Ireland, effectively abandoning him, only to write a single letter from Philadelphia thirty years later in a plea for understanding and forgiveness. The abandoned child—who became my grandfather—dramatically burned that single letter and never replied. (34)

Such a departure from Carrick-on-Suir and its environs was not unique to the Coady family during the nineteenth century. In his memoir, the singer Liam Clancy, a contemporary of Coady's, describes a similar disruption (though a less secretive one) of Clancy family life during that century. It is a further illustration of the extent to which nineteenth century family life was rendered unstable by poverty, illness, poor health care, and emigration:

Not all of the Clancys, though, could take this subservience. My grandfather's father took off for America, leaving a family of twelve children behind. He settled in Florida and married again. Being a good Catholic, he proceeded to start a family of thirteen children with his new wife. He didn't hide anything, either. One of his descendants, Margaret Clancy of New York, later came back to contribute a new stained glass window to the parish church in Piltown. It's there to this day. (14)

Coady's second commentary is a gloss on Irish emigration itself and the silence that has gathered around it:

Consider the uncreated conscience of the Irish diaspora. Whatever about cunning, there has certainly been exile and silence. A quite astonishing degree of silence in fact, whether willed or otherwise. Apart from the ballad tradition, the experience of emigration—perhaps the most definitive historical reality for millions of Irish people over the last two centuries—has never articulated itself in anything like a commensurate literature of substance and dimension, either at home or abroad....Can this extraordinary lacuna in our national discourse, this relative silence relating to one of the central streams of our modern social history and communal experience, denote some deeply significant hiding-hole of denial and evasive amnesia in the national psyche? (28)

In "The Use of Memory," the extended final section of *All Souls*, Coady solders the familial and national narratives to indicate the undesirability and impossibility of their separation, and sees himself—man and poet—moving fluidly between the two. Coady is the writer who has settled in his hometown but he is also the grandson of his namesake—Michael Coady, the abandoned child—and the son of George Coady who witnessed the arrival of the letter from America, and its burning:



*Silence was the bitter  
answer you were given  
every empty day  
until you died:*

*by a breakfast table  
my child father  
watched your son unseal  
his darkest pain,*

*saw the pages torn and cast  
in mortal grief and anger  
out of an abandoned child's  
unspeakable heart-hunger  
into the brute finality  
of flame. (84)*

To hear the voices of the past and to recover silent memory from its vast, emigrant mass, Coady proceeds to Philadelphia to trace the progress and find the burial place of James Coady, the ancestor who abandoned his child. If he can describe this man's life, he can recover him again for the family, for Carrick, and for himself. It is important that the dead and exiled, the doubly dead, become part of the present as this will liberate them and those who have followed them from a lost past and a puzzled future, something that is expressed by T.S.Eliot in lines Coady inserts into "The Use of Memory," between "The Letter" and the beginning of his American narrative:

This is the use of memory:  
For liberation—not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From the future as well as the past. (85)

This long final section is what the book builds towards; however, it is worth noting briefly the earlier sections to understand how this work moves towards its superb conclusion. In the first six sections, Coady ranges widely. As he has done in his earlier volumes, he describes and celebrates aspects of Carrick life though in *All Souls* he is overwhelmed by the weight these carry across time:

You begin to feel  
a kind of terror  
at the weight  
  
of what lies stacked  
from floor to ceiling  
all about you. (26)

Coady reaches back into folklore and history to illustrate the extent to which even the

battle between St. Patrick and Oisín, between the Christian and pre-Christian view, is still relevant to contemporary Ireland. He provides translations of poems written in Irish from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as homages to the final representations of experience in that language at a time when it was fading from South Tipperary forever. Language loss, like emigration, is another mode of dispossession. He forges a collection of sayings heard on the street and in pubs into a section of haiku-like vignettes. In “The Picture House,” he describes the social classes of Carrick and how they are divided:

Under one roof for fifty years  
 our town divided into three;  
 balcony, parterre and pit defined  
 the truth of caste in our community. (31)

In the title poem, a reverie that takes place as the speaker walks home from the pub, he encounters the living and the dead and records their names, deeds, and siphons particulars of their lives, in both Irish and English:

and there’s Mag Delaney at the West Gate  
 hearing her own last Act of Contrition  
 under the wheels of a Crossley Tender... (50)

He provides an account of a night in November, 1927, when his father and two uncles attended Verdi’s *La Forza Del Destino* at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York before his father returned home to live in Carrick. In addition to providing us with a more complex version of the musical tastes of the emigrant Irish than we are accustomed to, this section celebrates the Coady’s long family tradition of interest in music and musicianship, and music itself: opera, brass band music, traditional music. Furthermore, allusions are made to Jazz, the new sensation of the age, when the narrator interjects: “in another part of the city on that November evening wasn’t the young Duke Ellington raising a storm at The Cotton Club?” (41). Just as Coady’s father has returned to Ireland so too has Jazz found an away across the Atlantic to South-Eastern Ireland: when his parents-to-be first meet at a dance in the Foresters’ Hall “Duke Ellington’s ‘Solitude’ [played] as they danced together” (44). In common with “The Blind Arch” and “The Use of Memory,” “Three Men Standing at the Met” is rendered in prose. The formal effect, therefore, has the feel of musical improvisation.

Writing of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Karen Lawrence has noted that:

One can describe *Ulysses* as a book that changes its mind as it progresses and forces a corresponding change of mind in the reader. The segmented quality of *Ulysses*—the discontinuity of the narrative as it dons various stylistic “masks”—can be treated as successive breaks in “narrative contracts” and successive rhetorical experiments rather than segments in a spatial whole. The reader of *Ulysses* comes to each chapter with expectations that are contingent upon what he has experienced not only in other novels but also in the preceding chapters of this one. These expectations are frustrated and altered as the book progresses. The narrative

contract we form at the beginning of the book—the implicit agreement between the writer and the reader about the way the book is to read—is broken. (6)

In *All Souls*, Coady breaks the long-cultivated poetic contract that has developed between Irish poets and readers of their works. At various points, the reader must question the very text being read and wonder aloud about what manner of poetry collection this is when it includes as much prose as poetry and contains photographs, parts of an opera program, elements of a family tree, in addition to the familiar lyrics and translations which, when mixed-in with the unusual elements, are rendered strange. Like *Ulysses*, *All Souls* is full of discontinuities—of time, place, and multiple genres—which give it its formal originality. Also, particular sections of *Ulysses* and *All Souls* have much in common: Joyce's Circe chapter and Coady's "All Souls" are both mad, rhapsodic rambles though the city/town at night. Like *Ulysses*, *All Souls* is a modernist text though one written sixty years later. It has much in common, too, with Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Pound's *Cantos* in its use of collage, its poet/reader contract breaking, and its multilingualism. Although multilingualism is usually associated with colonialism and postcolonialism in Irish critical discourse, Coady reminds us that it is also a product of modernism. Joyce, as Lawrence points out, retains a basic fidelity to fact with the result that *Ulysses* is always grounded in realism and the same can be said of *All Souls* (11).

Coady's debt to Joyce is further confirmation of the influence that Joyce has had on Irish poets, as Dillon Johnston has explained. In addition to these more obvious literary influences, I would hazard that two modes of musical expression have played parts in framing the poetic structure of *All Souls*: traditional music and Jazz. From traditional music heard in Doolin and elsewhere, Coady noted how the individual musician simultaneously repeats and alters the jig or reel being played, and from Jazz he learned an even more radical mode of experimentation and collage. For Alfred Appel, Jr., in *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce*, Modernist literature, painting, sculpture, and Jazz are wrought, to a large degree, from the same hard ground, share similar artistic ploys, and all of this has filtered down to Coady who, as already noted, informs us that his parents first danced to Ellington's "Solitude." In the United States, from the Black Mountain and Beat poets to the present, Jazz is often cited as an important influence on how poetry is composed. Of modern Irish poetry collections, Ciaran Carson's *Belfast Confetti* comes closest to *All Souls* as it too is a compendium of various poetic forms and literary genres, and Carson is also a musician and poet. What Carson has written of Dante's youth can also be applied to Joyce, Carson, and Coady:

"In his youth," says Boccaccio, "Dante took the greatest delight in music and song; and with all the best singers and musicians of those times he was in friendship and familiarity."(xxi)

From a purely visual aspect, John Montague's *The Rough Field* has much in common with *All Souls*: in both works, the visual images are important narrative, poetic, and rhetorical devices. In his reading of *All Souls*, Daniel Tobin privileges the poem's visual elements by noting its "bricolage structure, its organization around bits and pieces" and how the poem, like a movie is delivered, then undermined, by "voices and voiceovers" (37). Both

readings point to the Modernist path that Coady has chosen to walk. A final twist in the issue of the genre is provided by the dramatic elements present in *All Souls*: in 1997, Coady's "arrangement for multiple voices of the poem 'All Souls' was given public readings in Kilkenny, Waterford, and at the book's launch in Carrick," and "Three Men Standing at the Met" was broadcast on RTE Radio 1 in 2001 (138).

At the heart of "The Use of Memory" is Coady's question: "Can words upon the page restore a lost and broken man to the fractured hearthstone of kinship?" (108). Coady relates the story of Michael, the abandoned child, who rose from poverty to middle-class respectability in Carrick while, at the same time, remaining tortured and wounded by his father's desertion of him, as he so dramatically proclaimed by tearing up the letter in which his father sought forgiveness and reconciliation. The author also searches for James, the father who abandoned his son, and unearths a fable of poverty, sadness, ill-health, and alcoholism played out in New York and Philadelphia and ending with his death in 1915:

Ireland is often ignorant of the realities of Irish immigrant life in America. We have heard of the trumpeted successes, some of mythically rare proportions, while below those spectacular pinnacles we may be able to guess at an extensive grey middle ground of survival and modest achievement over generations. What remains largely unrecorded is the limbo world of those who sank in failure, the type of wasteland of social disconnection, drift and dereliction memorably recreated and redeemed by William Kennedy in his "Albany" trilogy and notably *Ironweed*. (108)

While in Philadelphia, James Coady married for a second time and Mary, like his first wife, also died while giving birth—to a stillborn girl. Another daughter died in infancy and neither of his sons lived beyond their second decade. Michael Coady objectively records the information he has gathered in America while positioning himself outside of the moral debate. At the same time, he restores the narrative of James Coady's life to the larger narratives of family, town, and nation so that he is recovered from the silence of the past just as John Montague's emigrant family is recovered from Brooklyn in *The Dead Kingdom*. For the reader, the crime committed by James Coady is lessened when seen in the context of the hard life he encountered in America, and by the fact that his son was probably better cared for by his grandfather in Carrick than he could have been by his desperate father in America.

Although *All Souls* calls on Irish readers and writers to pay greater attention to the diaspora, it is primarily Coady's personal voyage to bond with what he refers to as "*pre-sequance*," or "a knowing return to a seminal moment in the past from its own future" (88). He arrives in Philadelphia to walk in James Coady's footsteps, to find his grave, and learn the ironic news that of James Coady's offspring the only child to enjoy a long life was the abandoned child in Ireland. In Philadelphia, Coady is brought deep into the Irish history of the city. He attends Mass at St. Philip de Neri church where James and Mary Coady worshiped, where their children were baptized, and where their requiem masses were offered in 1893 and 1915, respectively. He recalls the anti-Irish-Catholic riots of 1844 which necessitated the deployment of 5000 troops on the streets of the city, and a memorial sermon preached in Irish at St. Philip's in 1847 to mark the death of Daniel O'Connell. Coady notes that the streets where the Coadys lived are clustered together and

near the river and is reminded of Carrick:

All of the successive addresses I find are in an area as compact as that between Carrick's Main Street and the river Suir, with the same pattern of street cluster fronted by a river, the configuration differing only in scale. (121)

His research, reading and walking, allows Michael Coady a glimpse of James Coady's hopeless American Dream.

Also, the mystery at the center of the family's narrative is revealed and described so that anger and loss are converted into understanding and empathy. To underscore this new reality, Coady introduces two powerful notes of epiphany. The first occurs in the church in Philadelphia:

Nothing prepares my already heightened imagination for what dramatically explodes out of the blue during the Mass—the church suddenly darkening, wind through the wide open windows whirling and scattering prayer leaflets, the cosmic flare and crackle of lightning, the shattering detonation of thunder and cloudburst even as the priest raises the chalice. In my suggestible state I am shaken by it, as by some kind of dramatic pentecostal visitation... (118)

The heavens have opened and the Gods have spoken to honor James Coady's rescue from silence and to celebrate the completion of Michael Coady's journey. It is a gesture of continuance not closure. The second epiphany appears at the end of *All Souls* when the news that Michael and Martina Coady's third child has been named Michael James:

The summer of 1990 brought the birth of our third child, a son. We named the infant Michael James for reconciliation and Marcus for remembrance of his mother's father. From the later migration by another James, a Coady in Connecticut made his christening shawl. The basket weaver made his crib. (135)

Even though "The Use of Memory" is written in prose, the closing pages, because of the presence of rich epiphanies, are statements of faith in the moment, and in the power of the lyrical impulse and the lyric poem. In this way, it is linked to Coady's earliest poems. Fittingly enough, for a work that pushes the borders of Irish poetry, the last word is spoken by a photograph: it's of the Suir, its bridge and weir, and of a man and child posing for the camera near Oven Lane. *One Another*, the 2003 volume that follows *All Souls*, makes use of similar methods of composition and orchestration to explore further aspects of Carrick-on-Suir's various histories. It is worth noting that Coady is one of a very small group of rural-born Irish writers who have lived almost all of their adult lives in the places where they were born and reared. In 1998, he was elected to Aosdána, the academy of Irish writers and artists.

In "A Local Habitation," a talk aired on RTE 1 in 2000, Coady took time to take measure of his life as a writer:

So unlike most writers, I still live where I was born. I've remained on site and that compels and enables an intimate focus: the vertical as well as the horizontal dimen-

sion of space. The horizontal is what you see: the people currently walking around, the state of the tide at this moment on the river, who is being buried or born today. The vertical dimension is the absent presence, what lies underneath and invisibly all around; the deep, deep accumulation of lives and living on the site... (2)

Although he returned after college to his hometown to live, it was, as he has pointed out, the luck of a teaching position becoming available as soon as he had qualified, and family circumstances, that made his return possible ("A Local Habitation" 2). Over the last decade and a half, Michael Coady has produced important work both as poet and essayist that has culminated in *All Souls*, a work of daring originality and fierce passion that recovers from history those silenced, often broken, voices of the diaspora. Thinking of Micho Russell, Coady wonders "what is a living tradition but the people who carry and embody it, individually and communally" (4). Certainly, Coady himself embodies all that is important in the poetry of Ireland.

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