

TERRY McDONAGH

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**BLAUPAUSE**  
B O O K S

*For  
Seán and Matthew*

*Thanks are due to the many children  
and colleagues I've worked with  
for their inspiration.*

*Special thanks to Joanna.*

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# AUTOMATIC BLINDS

At my old school, we got  
new automatic blinds  
that came down when the sun  
was hot, and went up again  
when it disappeared  
behind a cloud. Our class  
loved the blinds and prayed  
for super sun and moody skies.

Some parents noticed their children  
listening to the weather forecast  
before school and wondered.

Weeks went by. We clapped and  
chuckled at every little cloud  
until one day our teacher ran away  
to live high up a tree in the forest.

We were all really sad and sent her  
flowers. A man with a ladder  
came and took the blinds away.

The old curtains were put back up.  
All together we wrote to our teacher  
telling her of rain, rain, only rain.

She did return, and told stories  
of the sun gods, eclipses and  
dark winters in Scandinavia.

As before, she opened and closed  
the curtains by hand, but nobody  
would ever forget the automatic blinds.

# HEAD LICE

I've had head lice  
twice ...

scratch ... scratch.

Nearly went bananas, I did.  
Worse than bad breath, it was!  
Good mates defect to  
enemy gangs, take the lice  
with them and keep on

scratching.

My things were put  
in the freezer  
to frostbite the life  
out of the geezers ...

scratch.

I cried for my Teddy  
in his cold, cold cot ...

scratch.

A teacher got lice four times.  
The kids went wild and cheered.  
The teacher went home ...

scratch.

They get into hair  
and into clothes  
and onto pillows  
and onto car seats  
and onto toys  
and onto teddies  
and onto friends.

They get around ...

scratch.

One kid took  
a photo of a louse  
and enlarged it.  
It looked like a mouse.  
A small girl fainted.  
*Oh, my God!*

Scratch!

Some say super lice  
that can't be killed  
are on the way.  
Don't let this happen,  
please ...

scratch.

My friend said  
her whole class  
had head lice  
at her last school  
and they scratched

and scratched

dehctarcs dna.

scratch  
scratch

scratch

scratch

scratch  
*scratch*

**scratch**

*scratch*



# DREAM-TREE-HOUSE

I'm older now and our tree  
is gone but I still long for  
the dream-tree-house  
my grandfather built for us  
before frantic rock and  
savage metal drove  
our ghosts away. I think  
we were happy till then.

When the factory came  
old trees fell  
    like stars  
in winter,  
    high-rise flats  
dropped  
    into the valley  
and the river gave way  
to a car park.  
Everything died, except  
for swearing and cement.

We got our fish from  
fish farms – frozen,  
meat from cages – frozen,  
milk from the fridge,  
potato puree and cheese  
from overseas.

Now that the factory is closed,  
we are left high up here  
among loose power lines  
and rattling windows.

Some curious birds and animals  
have come back to try again  
but we are too weak to cheer them on.

# THE FIRE ALARM

Our class is quiet today  
because Miss Cardigan  
is telling us about our  
fire-alarm system.

While she is droning on about  
escape-route doors and extinguishers,  
little Thomas is dreaming of pushing  
the red fire-alarm button.  
It would be so much  
fun!

In his mind, he can see  
happy kids racing in all  
directions:  
without schoolbags,  
through blazing classrooms,  
in football gear,  
in the rain,  
in snow,  
in sunshine,  
in springtime,  
in autumn,  
in winter,  
at nine o'clock,  
at two,  
at twelve,  
day and night,  
during maths,

when Miss C. is angry  
– never in the holidays  
or at weekends.

He sees himself  
pushing the button  
time and time again,  
one false alarm  
after another,  
minute by minute,  
hour by hour,  
day after day,  
week in week out,  
year after year,  
forever and ever,  
till the end of time.

# THE JAIL BIRD

The jail bird on our road  
doesn't even look like a bird  
but he's been to jail  
for bank robbery,  
I overheard a neighbour say.

I peeped over the hedge  
when he was in his garden  
and was hugely disappointed  
to see him pruning apple trees  
and trimming hedges.

I'd hoped he'd be cleaning his gun,  
or making masks at the back door.  
I wanted to see him stacking  
bank notes or hiding jewels  
under a rose bush. But no!  
all he did was water the flowers  
and mow the lawn.

One afternoon, I saw him leave  
the house.

Trembling,

I shadowed him  
all the way to the bank.  
In he went.  
I called the police  
and hid at the corner.

There was noise  
and chaos everywhere.  
It was brilliant!

At breakfast Mum said  
I'd been calling out 999  
in my sleep.  
'Are you feeling...?'  
'Fine, Mum. I'm fine.'

The jail bird was planting daisies  
as I passed  
on my way to school.

I wonder what he keeps  
in his tool shed.

# THE LIAR

There's this new guy  
in our class  
who just can't tell the truth.  
He makes me so angry.

He's seen everything.  
He's done everything.  
He's richer than everyone.  
He's better at sport than us.  
He's been everywhere.

His clothes cost the earth.  
He stays out late.  
He's got his own telly.  
He's a year older and  
he's good-looking, of course!

My friend says it's all true.  
She's seen his house  
and his father's car.

But I don't believe her  
because she likes him  
and I can't stand him!

He's so full of himself.  
A liar, for sure.

# POTHOLES AND PUDDLES

It rained last night and  
this morning the potholes  
on our road were full.  
I'd be late for school  
but didn't care.

When I looked into one,  
I could see a deep kingdom  
where fish were friends  
and fishermen hooked each other  
high above on the raging pier.

There were detective sharks  
on the lookout for teachers' pets  
and dancing dolphins  
biting into swot backsides.

In another pothole, there were  
fat heaps full of fizz and cake  
at dozens of birthday parties.

I'll be eight tomorrow and  
my mother won't be home.  
I'd like to play with my friend  
but he's away visiting his dad  
in prison. I wish my granny  
didn't smoke all the time.

I've still got two puddles  
to go.



# RULES

Stop talking!  
Listen to me!  
Be quiet!  
Be on time!  
Sit down!  
Learn it by heart!  
Stand up!  
Ask your mother!  
Dress properly!  
Sit up straight!  
Read good books!  
Don't watch TV!  
Do your homework!  
Don't be late!  
Wipe your feet!  
Close the door!  
Speak properly!  
Repeat after me!  
Watch your tenses!  
Behave yourself!  
Don't be cheeky!  
Start again!

Time for bed.  
Time to get up.  
Time for school.  
Time for home.  
Time for homework.  
Time for bed.

Time for TV?

Time for friends?

Time for football?

Time for internet?

Time for hanging out?

Time for cinema?

Teachers and parents

just don't know

the score.

They never did

and never will.

When I grow up

I'll live with

my kids among

the stars – without

school or rules

or school rules.

# BOXES

One day, our teacher  
put boxes of different colours  
in a row and asked us  
to chose one  
and tell the class  
what we thought  
was in it.  
We were to use our imagination.  
It was fun.

I said there was a sleepy horse  
in the smallest yellow box.  
She asked me if the horse  
was a big horse and I said,  
'Yes, he's a giant horse.'  
My friends laughed.  
I said it again for effect.  
'He's a big, giant lazy horse,  
big as a house in the sky!'

They laughed even louder.  
I wanted to say more  
but teacher screamed,  
'That's enough!'

One of the girls had a red box  
full of soldiers and hungry children  
in a desert. She said she would put  
food and roses in her box each day.

The new quiet boy said  
his blue box was empty.  
No one believed him.  
Someone asked what he'd like  
to have in his box  
and he replied, he'd like  
to have his dad at home in it

My friend said, there was  
a dancing pencil in her  
black box and  
when the lid came off  
the pencil would write on the wind.

# I HOPE SO

Sometimes, when my class  
is quiet and working,  
I sit wondering what they  
will be doing in twenty years.

Some will have children  
of their own, a few will  
be rich and like money.

One of them might be famous  
and wallow in bright lights and  
the sound of clapping.

They look so busy, sitting  
thinking of answers to problems  
in books. Are some of them  
dreaming of coloured stars,  
fairy pebbles on a faraway shore  
or life behind the moon?

Will they make the world  
a better place for children?  
Will they always cry when  
a pet dies or a special friend  
has to leave them?

Do they sometimes think  
the book is daft, or that I am  
a little silly. I hope so.  
I am happy here with my  
class. I wonder if one of them  
will, one day, sit watching  
their class? I hope so.

# THE HUNT

I will always remember  
being eleven and petrified  
at the sight of a grown man  
– in full flight –  
being swallowed up  
by hedges and gorse bushes,  
with a fat policeman and  
a handful of neighbours, armed  
with pitchforks and sticks,  
in hot pursuit.  
Dogs barked in the distance.

They gave up the chase  
when he took a fence  
in his stride.  
I was relieved to see him  
top the hill  
and disappear forever  
into my imagination.

# MY FRIEND JIM

My friend, Jim, rides  
to school on his pony.  
He doesn't use a saddle.  
While other kids are  
getting out of cars, he  
is tethering Starkey  
to a tree by the stream.

Jim hasn't been with us long  
and he won't be staying.  
He's a traveller from all over.

He dreams he's going to build  
a big-top with strings to the stars  
and he'll comb galaxies  
for a lightning steed  
more elegant than any thoroughbred  
in the land of Ireland.

My dad doesn't want Jim  
coming round our way  
– travellers steal,  
he says.

Jim's my friend.

One day he gave me  
a piece of shiny glass  
from his mother  
to bring me luck.  
Another time he gave me  
stones in different colours.

I keep them out of sight  
under my mattress and  
only take them out when  
the moon fills my bedroom.  
They glow like singing  
in the copper corner.

I feel strong and grateful  
to my friend, Jim.

One day, we'll share  
the roads of this country.  
I just know we will.



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

Two boys lit a piece of paper  
in the toilet. Someone saw  
smoke. There was chaos.

Their teachers couldn't understand it.  
'I don't understand. Why?'

Their parents couldn't understand it.  
'We don't understand. Why?'

The principal couldn't understand it.  
'It won't ever happen again at our school.'

Again and again,  
they were asked,  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?

why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
why?  
Twenty times.

One boy said, he didn't know  
and the other boy said  
he liked playing with fire.

# ALEXANDER

All the lads in our class  
liked Alex. The girls  
didn't. He wasn't cool.  
When he missed  
the ball, he laughed  
and the boys did.  
The girls didn't.  
The teacher was a girl  
teacher. When his  
pen  
                                fell,  
the boys sniggered.  
The girls didn't.  
When he said  
he loved a frog, the boys  
exploded –  
                                the girls didn't:  
*– he's stupid!*

When he bent  
                                down  
for  
                                his  
                                pen,  
the teacher fell over  
his  
                                bottom  
and landed on  
her  
                                head.

She went to hospital.  
The boys giggled.  
The girls didn't. Alex  
didn't. Alex fell on  
the ball. He didn't  
laugh. The boys  
didn't. The girls did.

He was alone with the ball  
and didn't know how to play.

The teacher returned.  
She didn't smile. Alex  
didn't. The boys  
didn't. The girls  
didn't. Alex cried a lot  
at home.  
The fourth class  
didn't laugh much for a while.

# PLAYING HORSY

Standing by a school wall  
I watched a group of children  
playing horsey  
in a corner of the playground  
with the autumn wind  
tossing dust and dead leaves  
in upon them.

They didn't seem  
to notice. They just  
kept on trading  
and grooming  
with nothing, but  
a piece of cord  
and wild imagination  
to warm them.

Straining up high  
in their stirrups,  
they could see  
the whole world.

# THE PRIMARY PUPPET

While bombs were falling  
on Asian soil, the puppet class  
was called upon  
to down tools and listen  
to the President's master plan  
in case of a bomb threat:

'We will run to an open field.  
You will be safe in that field.'

'It is a model battlefield,'  
he assured them.  
'There are flags for everyone'  
– he had his directives from  
on high, he said.

One bemused girl asked  
if they could wear masks  
as a form of protection.  
The President said,  
'Yes! A novel idea'

There could be blackened faces  
like brave soldiers,  
and gas masks  
in case of fallout.

They all giggled.  
He didn't.

'War is a serious business.  
It will always be with us.'

A senior student suggested  
they read poetry and sang  
in the open field – and  
it might rain. The President  
clicked his heels and said  
there would be no talking,  
noise or absurdities in public  
– in particular  
on fields of battle and,  
as a senior student,  
she should know  
that poetry and singing  
belonged to choirs and classrooms.

'If you want to be silly later in life,  
you can join a theatre company.'

They were now at school  
learning the hard facts.  
When the war was over,  
visual arts students would  
be working on a monument  
to an unknown soldier, and  
young poets could write laments  
to their dead heroes.

One student took a puppet  
out of his pocket  
and held it up for all to see.

'And what is that, young man?'

'It's a puppet, Sir.'

'It looks like a soldier.'

'It is a soldier, Sir.'

The President scratched  
his head. He was happy to say  
there would be an information screen  
with honours lists  
and military updates  
along the hedgerows.

A small boy made his way  
to the front, raised his hand  
and politely asked  
where the field was.

The President looked confused  
but reassured the boy  
it was on its way, and  
it would do us proud.

All but one of the class  
took out their puppets.



# WHY CAN'T WE HAVE OUR OWN GODS?

My friend was born Christian.  
I was born Jew.  
We go to the same school,  
live in the same street,  
like wearing the same clothes,  
like eating the same food,  
love swimming,  
love playing volleyball,  
don't like doing homework,  
don't like getting up.

I go to the synagogue  
on Saturday.  
She goes to church  
on Sunday.

My mother tells me,  
we are the Chosen People.

My friend's mother tells her,  
their God is their Saviour.

I told my mother and  
she told her mother  
we had seen gods laughing,  
singing and dancing together  
in a circle of moonlight.

They both said, we  
couldn't have: 'You are  
too young to understand  
but, one day, you will.'

But we do understand!

We talk to our gods  
who dance with us  
in the moonlight.

## NEW FLARES

Last week, I bought  
a pair of trousers  
– flares!  
and home I went  
full of joy, only  
to hear from my mother  
her flares used to be  
almost identical  
– better even!  
Hers were bellbottoms.

She knows as well  
as I do that flares  
are new  
and have never been  
worn before.

‘I’m different,’  
I told her.

She laughed, but  
I know she was  
jealous  
and only wanted  
to upset me  
so I stormed off  
to my room  
and banged the door.

‘Who does she think  
she is?’

I was upset,  
mad,  
angry,  
raging,  
furious.

Typical parents,  
adults,  
grown ups

to suggest that flares  
were worn  
in their time.  
They're too old  
to remember.

I will never tell lies  
to my children.  
It isn't fair.

Okay, they might  
have had flares  
but never like ours.  
I told her that  
at tea. I didn't care  
how she felt.

My best friend  
has the same problem  
with her mother.

Flares are just  
one example.

## IF I CAN, I WILL

Tom is the new class representative.

Before the elections, Tom promised:  
'If I win, there will be free drinks  
for everyone at Christmas.'

One girl pledged: 'If I win,  
we will have less homework.'

And a boy gave his word: 'If I win,  
we will have more class trips.'

The teacher counted the votes  
and Tom won by a single vote.

The new quiet girl cried  
because she got no votes.

At home, Tom's father asked  
about his first meeting with  
all the other class representatives.  
Tom said, the others were  
bigger and older and  
it was boring – he didn't  
understand them, anyway.  
'But the voting was fun, Dad!'

'You must try to keep  
your promise to the class, Tom.'

'If I can, I will, Dad.'

'If you can't get cola for everybody  
what will you do, Tom?'

'When is Christmas, Dad?'

His dad smiled.

'If I can, I'll help, Tom.'

'Thanks, Dad.'

Tom like his dad.

## TEACHERS' DRESS

We girls in the fourth class think  
our teachers dress badly,  
look weird

– like parents.

We don't want to mention names  
but our principal doesn't polish  
her shoes, and Miss Smart,  
the tall teacher, wears funny jeans  
and sandals with grey socks.  
A friend's mother saw her coming  
out of a pub, singing and carrying  
a goose she had won playing poker.

One gentle, pale lady paints her nails,  
wears too much lipstick  
and likes discos and muesli.  
She looks cool, a bit impractical  
like a parrot or somebody special.

Our favourite teacher is a man.  
He wears yellow ties and looks  
tired in the mornings –  
he's not married.

The pale lady  
and the man with ties  
look nice together.  
We see them talking  
in the car park – giggling  
after school, but  
they drive home  
in separate cars.

That's sad, we think.

# A CLASS-PROJECT ON THE BEATLES

'Let's do a project on The Beatles, class?' Blank  
faces. A small voice said:  
'They are very old. Granddad remembers their  
music. He wore their shoes.'  
'Shoes?'  
'Yeh, pointy ones. One Beatle was murdered.'  
'Murdered!'  
'In America. John something.'  
'My dad will know.'  
'He's too young.'  
The teacher turned pale.

(This fifty word Mini-Saga was short-listed for *The Daily Telegraph* prize.)



# MICHAEL

Michael used to be a pest,  
a nuisance in class.

'He's a bright boy,  
but...'

the teacher  
wrote to his parents.

'He's a good boy  
but...'

the principal  
wrote to his parents.

He was sent home,  
grounded,  
given extra work,  
no pocket money,  
his swimming even stopped.

His parents were called in  
to discuss Michael.  
They came on separate days  
to do their best for their son:

'He's a good boy, really.'  
'He isn't a bad boy.'

Michael joined Young Writers  
at school and put his wish  
into four lines:

'I wish my mum and dad  
and my sister and me  
could all be together in a house  
by the sea. That's my wish.'

When he had read it  
to the group,  
he seemed happier.

The teacher made two copies  
and sent them to his parents' homes.

# NOTHING'S FAIR

What's all this about fairness?  
Nothing's fair when  
you're a kid. Parents  
can fight all they want to  
and it's okay –  
they can even divorce.  
When kids have fights,  
it's big stuff:  
no pocket money, lines  
TV withdrawal threats.

Just last week, I tried  
to fly my new UFO  
from our upstairs window  
and just because it landed  
on Mrs Murphy's cat, I'm  
out of favour –  
in the doghouse.

Oh, I can go to school,  
all right – even to  
my daft piano lessons  
but I can't repair my UFO.  
I'm a threat to the neighbourhood.

When Dad crashed the car,  
Mum put her arms round him.  
He was in shock, poor man.  
I'm in a permanent state of shock  
and I get my freedom chopped.

Dad's driving again.  
Mum's more loving than ever  
to him

– to me she's horrible,  
just because my invention  
killed Murphy's black cat.

Nothing's fair when you're a kid.  
I'll create chaos when I'm older.  
I'll get my own back. I will!

# THE ANARCHIST

I am a third class anarchist.  
That's what Miss Frost said.  
I tried to tell my mum  
that our teacher got angry  
and went for a walk  
during silent reading.  
I had finished my work and  
only wanted to look out at  
the older boys playing football.  
I like football.  
'You must behave in class,  
no matter what.'  
'but I do, Mum.'

Once, I saw a pink pigeon  
daydreaming on the wires  
and another time, I saw  
a flying cow on the page.  
The girls said I was stupid  
– that cows didn't fly.  
Miss Frost gave me a cold look  
and told me to sit down  
and stop disturbing.

I don't tell my mother everything.

I can be very happy  
just looking out the window,  
watching too much telly  
or playing football with  
my new shoes in mud.

I hate homework.

I saw Mum smile when I told her  
I liked doing things properly  
most of the time, but when  
spiders crept out of corners,  
or snowflakes blew into drifts,  
I forgot myself and went for a look.

‘What’s an anarchist, Mum?’

# TONE-DEAF-PETER

Peter goes to school  
at the usual time  
on Tuesdays –

late,  
to miss singing.  
He hates standing  
in a straight row  
with his mouth  
opening and closing  
like a baby crow  
in a hungry nest.

Peter likes singing,  
and when he thinks  
nobody's listening,  
he sings in his head  
like a rock-star in bed.

He's sung to his cat,  
even to a thrush  
in a summer bush.

What he doesn't like  
is having to be quiet  
standing in a row  
with his mouth opening  
and closing  
while others are singing.

Christmas is the worst.

# BEST FRIENDS

I have a best friend.  
We do everything together.  
She comes to my house:  
to my mum,  
to my dad,  
to my colours,  
to my dog,  
to my baby brother,  
to my room,  
to my dreams,  
to my friends,  
to my books,  
to my swimming,  
to my music,  
to my stories,  
to my tears,  
to my secrets,  
and she, sometimes,  
stays over at weekends.

Next year, she is leaving  
for another country.  
I'll be sad, but I know  
we'll be best friends  
forever. Mum says so.



# JIMMY AND JOE

Jimmy, the monkey, had been  
on Joe's shoulder for an age.  
They were both old. One day,  
Jimmy fell off after lunch  
and that was that.

Try as they might there was  
no way back up. He would  
have to go to the nursing home  
for ageing monkeys at the zoo.  
Joe would take him there  
in his rickety old banger.

The old monkey wasn't happy.  
He huffed. He puffed.  
He brooded in his bedroom.  
They both cried big tears.  
Joe promised to visit.

Next day, dressed in their best  
and hand-in-hand  
they hobbled to the car.  
It wouldn't start.

Just then, a lonely young man  
– without monkey experience –  
chanced to pass.  
Their red eyes moved him to stack  
his right shoulder to the earlobe  
with monkey nuts and bananas.

He said his name was Joe Young,  
a blacksmith, used to carrying loads.

Jimmy knew which side  
his bread was buttered on  
when he hinted Joe Young  
might move in with them.

One day, after Jimmy  
had grown used to his new perch  
and the sun was high  
in the spring sky, the trio  
set off to visit the zoo in Dublin.

They did the rounds of cages.  
Jimmy chatted with old friends  
about the perils of the forests,  
cold life in captivity and  
the importance of love in your life.  
They all agreed in a flurry of screeches  
and Jimmy thanked his Joes with  
kind pats on their bald spots.

With the young man at the wheel,  
the old man and Jimmy slept,  
dreamed and snored softly  
all the way home.  
They woke in time to see  
their little cottage smile in  
a splash of moonlight.

# BACK-SEAT KIDS

The back seats in our classroom  
are scratched, written on  
and the legs are loose.

Front seats can never be  
back seats  
and back seats can never be  
front seats –  
they just can't.

Back-seat kids are kept in  
more often. They wear  
baseball caps sideways,  
try to be cool and stick  
chewing gum under seats.

They spend a lot of time  
outside Mr Principal's door  
waiting to be called in  
for throwing a schoolbag  
over the fence,  
a small child's lunch  
down the toilet, or  
spilling paint in the art room.

But:  
school back seats,  
cinema back seats,  
or bus back seats  
– all back seats  
fill up first

because back seats  
are back seats  
and the action is  
at the back  
in the back seats  
yeh!  
We are the back-seat  
boys,  
back-seat people  
in back seats.  
Back seats are  
cool!  
The best seats  
are back seats  
for back-seat kids  
and kids from the  
back seats. Yeh!

## AMONG THE DEAD

The Cill Aodain graveyard gate  
is always open. Nobody tries  
to get in or out. Monks used  
to sleep in the beehive hut,  
and the remains of a church  
and a few gravestones  
are still standing.

I have the bones  
of a poem in my pocket  
and I can't help wondering  
if my great relative in the corner  
would turn in his grave  
if I took it out and began  
reading aloud in full moonlight.

# SHIRLEY TEMPLE CURLS

Mum under the dryer, drinking coffee  
with eight-year-old Sharon  
on the next chair  
being curled down to the wishbone  
by a pair of hard-hearted hairdressers  
on the morning of big sister's wedding.

This dragging, tugging, curling,  
heating and clipping was worse  
than being punched, or  
having your hair pulled  
by silly boys on the playground.

'The Shirley Temple look,'  
one hairdresser reassures her.

'Is this person still alive?'  
'Alive? Why do you ask?'

Sharon didn't answer, but threw  
a sidelong glare at her mother, then  
a questioning look in the mirror at  
the row of adults waiting for hairdos.

She wondered about them and  
she tried to picture a poor little girl  
by the name of Shirley Temple.

## A BOY'S LIFE ON EARTH

The hardest journey on earth  
is that endless trip  
down the supermarket aisle  
between shelves of toys  
with your mother dragging you  
by the hand and you screaming  
hardly an inch from a talking teddy  
or a second from a button  
that could set a galaxy on fire.

And you tell me life is fun, Mum!

You kick, throw yourself down,  
promise not to buy, just look,  
maybe hold for a second,

while she entertains herself with paint  
for the railings, offers on toothpaste,  
tedious trolleys, boring bread  
and tins of kitty for the cat family

– no milkshakes, nothing tasty  
from the lower shelves,  
only up and down the healthy lane  
among chattering mothers,  
big sisters with lads, or dads  
with hairy noses and bald patches.

Worst of all is when friends of the family  
pick you up and half strangle you  
poking overfed faces into yours:  
'And how's our cute little man, today?'

And you tell me life is fun, Mum!

I'll scratch the baby  
if this goes on much longer.



## HAVIN THE CRAIC

After school by the bike shed,  
Joe, the lads and me  
were chewin the fat,  
havin the *craic* about fightin  
an laughin about sisters  
an what we hate for breakfast,  
an all that, when Joe's older sister  
burst out gigglin on the other side  
of the wall. She'd been listenin.  
Joe went red, cos he'd been sayin  
he never touched porridge  
– only cornflakes, an his sister  
tried to be bossy, an on the side  
of the parents, an all that.

Her mates must have been with her  
as well, cos we could hear them  
laughin about us an singin, na,na,  
nana, na, way down the road.  
We said nothin, cos Joe was bigger  
than us, an he was always chewin.

## POETRY DOESN'T PAY

When a boy of eleven or twelve  
asked me if I'd give up poetry  
for a million in cash,  
I had to think long and hard  
  
about my next line.

# BIOGRAPHY AND PUBLICATIONS:

Terry McDonagh, poet, dramatist and teacher, has lived in Hamburg for more than twenty years. He has had residencies in many countries in Europe, Asia and Australia. He now lives between Hamburg and Ireland. In addition to his books, his work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies, worldwide. *Boxes* is his first collection of poetry for young people.

## Publications:

### Poetry:

- 1 *The Road Out* – Olaf Hille Verlag, Hamburg – 1993.
- 2 *A World Without Stone* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg - 1998.
- 2 *A Song for Joanna* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg – 2002.
- 3 Included in: *Something beginning with P* – (anthology of Children's poetry) O'Brien Press, Dublin – 2004.

### Poetry in translation:

- 4 *Kiltimagh* – (into German) Blaupause, Hamburg. Translation by Mirko Bonné. (Grant-aided by Ireland Literature Exchange – 2001).
- 5 *Tiada Tempat di Rawa* – (into Indonesian) Indonesia Tera, Magelang, Indonesia. Translated by Sapardi Djoko Damono and Dami N. Toda. (Grant-aided by Ireland Literature Exchange – 2004).

### Prose:

- 6 *Elbe Letters go West / Briefe von der Elbe* – Blaupause Books, Hamburg – 1999.
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### Drama:

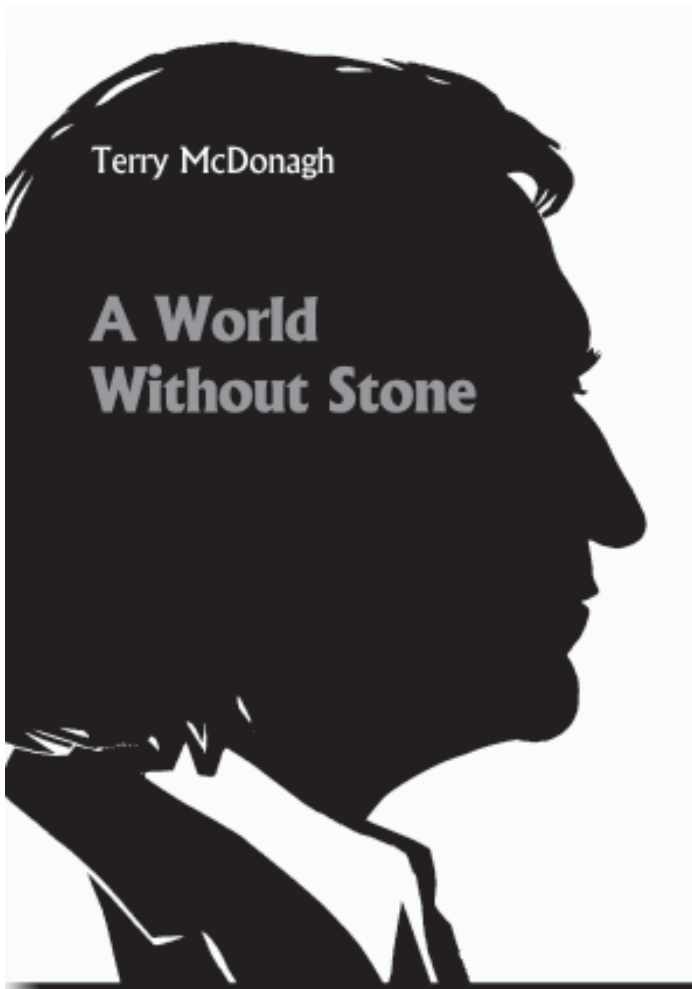
- 9 *I Wanted to Bring You Flowers/Ich kann das alles erklären* – Fischer Verlag, Aachen – 1991.



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