

*An Céilleacharach ag Muilte Kingston*

(KELLEHER AT KINGSTON MILLS)

Downhill from an ill-planted charge of black powder,  
The fore-shortened fuse tailed into fractured bedrock,  
We saw and heard nothing before the gut-sucking thump  
Tossed a whistling arc of stones, a battlefield rain,  
With rocks big as tea-chests falling about our ears,  
And a scythe of limestone sheared the arm off *Ó Súilleabháin*,  
The spade lifted above his head in paltry defence,  
Blood watering spongy ground as the life pumped out.

We steer no simple passage across the canal,  
But toil up the River Styx lengthwise,  
Through drowned lands and waterways of the dead.

The sickly season came, stands of jewelweed sprouted  
From weeping slopes where workers once trampled and swore;  
Queen Malaria feasted on us prostrate in the shanties,  
Her motile fingers broke our red blood cells open  
Like the lock's vast, red gates ratcheted wide,  
And I on my straw pallet felt the fever flood lift me,  
Drop me through spillways of sweat and delirium  
Till I emerged at length, crept weakened in the sunlight  
To rob turtles' nests of their eggs for my food.

We steer no simple passage across the canal,  
The unholy Styx journeyed lengthwise,  
Through drowned lands and waterways of the dead.

Stone sober I was over by Jack's Rifts, with *an tEigeartach*,  
Who was half-cut on the Royal Sappers' rum, we worked  
Clearing brush to help disperse the malarial vapours  
In a rising wind that rattled tangled snags above our heads.  
A widowmaker struck me, a fist to the back of the head,  
My whiskers abraded moss and stones as I sprawled.  
*An tEigeartach* shoved me valiantly into the canoe,  
But the wind swung her round and rising waves swamped her.  
Green watery stars exploded behind my eyes, while softly  
I sank to become one with the silt, my bones settled low  
And they darkened as the particles of my body floated free.  
No simple passage across the canal,  
We became the River Styx journeying lengthwise  
Through drowned lands and waterways of the dead.

(Note: *Ó Súilleabháin* = Sullivan

*An tEigeartach* = Haggerty)

Thank You to *Aralt Mac Giolla Chainnigh*.