

Stolen moments and brave imaginings

Poetry

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John Fitzgerald's *The Time Being* (Gallery, 60pp, €11.95) opens, strikingly, with destruction, "the smoky/ up-throttling roar" of a chainsaw in a boy's hand. "It was like cutting into pure fear/ to sunder it." Throughout this confident, graceful and often dark collection, Fitzgerald attends to the fear of historical continuance. The farmer, rather than tasked solely with the up-keep of tradition, is figured as a corrector, an atoner, determined "to make good the past".

It is rare to come across a debut from a poet whose voice is so assured and unfaltering. These lyrics are steeped in tradition, echoing Edward Thomas in places, and there are thrilling glints of a brave imagination: a cat's tongue, in one poem, is "genital pink".

Occasionally, one feels that the acuteness and precision of Fitzgerald's work could be deepened by digging into more vulnerable emotional territory, by risking

more. Indeed, Fitzgerald achieves this in many places. The best poem in the collection, *Spindle*, digs into an embittered, striking anger. Like the opening poem, *First Cut*, it carries all the richness of Fitzgerald's descriptive powers and enlists them into a thrillingly dark tale of retribution.

In *Spindle*, the speaker turns against their "ignorant father" to "end his tenure", to put an end to the influence of an unnamed injustice.

Each September I scan the hedgerow
for your gaudy lanterns
lighting up the green-dark shade:
pink biretta, plump pods, daring
orange aril.
But I never find them

The quality of the language carries a sense of biting dark, and spite: the tree is both "gaudy" and looked-for, the descriptions of its flowers both botanical and figurative (as in the "pink biretta", a three-pointed cap once worn by Catholic clergy). It is a stunning and grisly tale, with Fitzgerald leading us to the "Lair of the worse-than-useless,/ now skewered in his

grave, pig-smelling flesh rotted/ to bone", and in the end lighting a purging fire.

