

THE RADIO ROOM
OF S.S. THEDENS

and other poems

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OF S.S. THEDENS

and other poems

by

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Introduction

In 2014, I wrote my first poem in English, *Aodhan Dennehy*. It is now part of a cluster labelled “Impersonations”. Each poem in this cluster features a fictional observer; Aodhan Dennehy, a seven-year-old Irish boy, is one of them. On the afternoon of 21 May 1927, he hears a small aircraft pass over coastal meadows where he is flying his kite. When his parents tune in to the evening news, he learns that he has witnessed Charles Lindbergh on his way to Paris during the first solo transatlantic flight.

The idea for this poem took shape while running through the fields that surrounded the Brabant village of Welberg, where I lived in 2014. Behind dense clouds, I heard the sound of a light engine that I could not locate. This led me to think of Lindbergh, and of those on the ground who may not have realised they were witnessing history as they heard or saw him pass. His plane crossed the west coast of Ireland near Kells Bay at around three o’clock in the afternoon. Writing the poem required some research; the surname of my young Irish observer, for instance, came from an online telephone directory for that region.

The poems in this collection are arranged in clusters, of which “Impersonations” is one. Another is “Family,” which includes poems about my father, my mother, my wife, and my two sons - all of whom I love and seek to honour. As for the rest, I leave it to the reader to discover what my poetry reveals about the world as I see it. The clustering, I hope, offers a way into that exploration. Of course, poetry is not meant to get a ‘better understanding’ of a poet. Nonetheless, those who have never heard of me may gather an impression of the man behind the poems. On the other hand, those who do know me will perhaps be surprised when a poem offers confirmation of something they did not know yet.

Bergen op Zoom, the Netherlands, August 2026

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FAMILY

The Radio Room of S.S. Thedens

As sober and small, and
as clear and colourless as
its serrated capture, is the
radio room of S.S. Thedens.

It holds a young officer with
his hand on the tuning control
of a graphite powder-coated
transceiver: my father.

He wears a steel-band headset
with Bakelite earpieces, and
above him a brass ship's clock
reads half past twelve.

A loose-fitting tropical uniform
makes his tan deeper and
outshines the pale days of
a wartime adolescence.

Practising an eccentric skill
in two-hour shifts behind
wheelhouse and chart-room,
he was the crew's odd man out.

It is the most intriguing snap
of a mere handful that show
him in his twenties, in a novel
world as handsome as himself.

It contains what completed him,
what lasted a lifetime and
what carried us like waves that
we could always tune into.

Tutorial

Somewhere on YouTube she is
doing her hair in fifties style.
She cannot be twenty yet, and her
parents, she says, are downstairs.

More even than the final result,
it is the process that holds me; her
plain instructions, the bit she left out
while waiting for the curlers to cool,

brushing down the frizziness of her
new waves and showing us the pin
with which she secures a twisted
section on the back of her head.

When she is done, I see what my
mother looked like at that age:
made up for going into the world,
beautifully and innocently.

Rush

Doing my daily miles (to put age on hold),
I ran into a swarm of sparrows that held
the country road by landing ahead

of me and flying off again at my approach.
And with them came my aproned mother,
vividly shaking out our tablecloth over

the lawn while I waved her goodbye.
Scientists claim that men's brains - in
their late fifties - regenerate unedited rushes

shot long ago; sparrows vanished as I
grew up and now return with age, my brains
throwing me crumbs, and mother waving back.

Visiting the Bridges

Do we need the names of
things to recognize them?
Or is a shift in perspective
enough to bring them to
our attention unimpaired?

What proof is there
that innocence or ease
is required to make
us notice what we have
never seen before?

Do we fill things in rather
than allowing ourselves
to be surprised or are we
led by expectations that
shape and strengthen our

world as we see it or wish
it to be, missing moments
of unanticipated joy and
the unforeseen rewards
that come with openness?

Should we learn to observe
skies and landscapes
with the awareness of a
watercolourist or cram Latin
tags to obtain the hawk's

eye of an ornithologist? –
Our youngest, beholder of
a new world, christened
my workplace after one
of its architectural merits;

the pleasure of going
there with him, was enough
to fire curiosity for
each other's universe and
made me see bridges.

Performance

In days when different rituals
prevailed and howling storms
were on my repertoire to make
bedtime a theatrical event, we

staged worlds that paved the
way to face the real one, which
mirrors openness and gaiety
to protect you from its squalls.

Now you are out there, and
with my role done, I still close the
curtains of your room at eight –
occasionally, I protrude my lips

and put cupped hands over my
mouth, hoping that, when winds
pick up, you are safe and sound,
and will do well.