

Jim McElroy answers some questions after being chosen Poetry Joint Winner of MCA 2022:

**What is your connection with nature and why is it such an integral part of your work?**

A childhood spent on the family farm in the Mournes instilled a love of nature and its environment. As our planet and its weather patterns continue to remind us that our land ownership is custodial, I find myself musing about the competing pressures of population growth, war, climate change, hunger, and feel drawn to write about the land and its harvest, the need to respect its givens.

**Your work has its own rhythm and tone that informs active narrative evolutions. How did you reach a decision when selecting which poems you wanted to submit? When did you realise they were 'ready' for submission?**

The inherent rhythms and acoustics of language often nudge my drafting to make connections between words & phrases, and that then plays a part in the developing narrative. In choosing this year's poems, my experience from prior year's informed my selection. As I'd previously submitted poems on a range of subjects and been unsuccessful, I decided to change tack. As my writing has developed and, hopefully, become more assured, I felt I'd enough material to submit a tightly themed selection – which was also *structured around* the arc of a story line.

So I selected five related nature poems – beginning with the changes implied in the first poem, 'Pouring the Yard', where the horses depart for horsepower as the concrete buries 'hoof pock, boot print, rut of cartwheel', that then leading me to choose the seasonal sequence in the sowing and reaping of 'Painting the Fields'; the third poem then reflecting on the tough way of life that farming can be – my 'sweaty belly button is full of seed hay', my 'bored arm numbed' at the turnip cutting – sentiments expressed in 'Enough' as I depart the farm for a life away. It seemed logical then to follow that with the fourth poem where 'The Auctioneer' sells off of the animals as 'his gavel knock knocks, bidding arms lean on the guard rail' – the final poem, 'Sheep Carcass', then providing terminal imagery, as 'the skull's wedge is stripped of its wimple' – albeit signing off with a hopeful final image.

**What made you decide to participate this year?**

I almost didn't. The Mairtín Crawford Awards were established just as I began writing in 2018. I've been submitting every year since, and been unsuccessful. So I was unsure whether I'd give it another go; tho' as my pamphlet 'We Are The Weather' had just won the International Book and Pamphlet Award with Poetry Business, I convinced myself that my writing had reached a stage where it might be worth one more shot.

**How did it feel to get the news from The Crescent that you were the Joint Winner of the Mairtín Crawford Poetry Award 2022?**

I was thrilled. As I'd walked out of semi-retirement in 2018, and into beginner creative writing classes – the Crescent Arts Centre had offered a foothold to developing my love of words; reading groups and workshops at The Crescent had introduced me to the craft of poetry: the

‘sonic dance of vowel and consonant’ that Pascal Petit now says is the cornerstone of my voice. So, for me, after a series of rejections, the 2022 Mairtín Crawford Poetry Award brought both the delight of being joint-winner with the superb Kathryn Bevis, and the added joy of knowing the awards were hosted by the Crescent, where I’d written my first poems.

**Any advice for anyone considering entering the next round of Awards?**

From personal experience, I know rejection is the regular currency of those who submit written work. If, like me, you’ve submitted in the past and weren’t selected, my advice is not to throw in the towel. I’ve a series of Mairtín Crawford rejection emails in my inbox: don’t give up, keep writing, developing, submitting, and maybe good news might be waiting around next year’s corner.