

Barbara Smith lives in County Louth, Ireland. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from Queen's University, Belfast. Her achievements include being shortlisted for the UK Smith/Doorstop Poetry Pamphlet competition 2009, a prize-winner at Scotland's 2009 Wigtown Poetry Competition, and recipient of the Annie Deeny 2009/10 bursary awarded by the Tyrone Guthrie Centre for Artists and Writers, Ireland. Her first collection, *Kairos*, was published by Doghouse Books in 2007 and a second followed in 2012, *The Angels' Share*. She is a frequent reader with the Poetry Divas, a collective that read at festivals such as Electric Picnic.

Roosters

My granny used to soak the spuds too,
making it easy to peel them later.
Part of morning's ritual was topping
their pot with water. Later after
fowl were fed and tae and bread were ate,
she'd peel them slowly, humming all the while
a medley of *Moore's Almanac Songs*.

Steeping my potatoes now, as she did,
brings her *Four Green Fields* down the years to me.
Scaly and red, these Roosters, instead of
her soft Queens; mine tattle of modern machinery;
long scars that I smooth away with a stainless
peeler. I split them with a long broad knife,
rinse them and leave by for dinner.

Kairos, 2007. Doghouse Books.

Gwion's Birthday

Today I bought your birthday presents:
what you wanted and what I wanted
for you: new clothes and an Xbox game.
Back across the stretch of thirteen years
I reach for the time you nearly didn't make it
past your first: listless, sleeping on the sofa,
an infection deep within your bronchioles,
a third visit to the doctor for a letter
to admit you, a sweating wait outside the room
while they tried to insert a cannula – twice –
and put in a drip before your isolation
on the fifth floor with a window-whistling view
of the graveyard and our home beyond. It was
two days before your hands reached up to mine.

The Angels' Share, 2012, Doghouse.

Achieving the Lotus Gait

In winter, the uphill path to Madame Xing's
is treacherous. I watch for loose
stones among the grey brown gravel

and the birds are almost silent
as each step quarries me,
wincing on wooden pattens.

Madame unravels yards of stinking cotton
from my feet and her thorough thumbs
knead them from numbness,

She honours my feet with warmed water
loosening shedding skin,
trims each bruised nail to the quick.

She rebinds each foot in cotton lengths
soaked in herbs and animal blood.
A neat figure-of-eight turns

over instep, gathers toes, under foot
and round the heel, each pass tighter
than the last. And then my thoughts

cringe homewards, as I totter out under
a brittle moon; my own weight
crushing each foot into the correct shape.

Shortlisted Basil Bunting Poetry Competition, 2009
The Angels' Share, 2012, Doghouse Books.

Pair Bond

dedicated to Dolly Parton

The talk in the bar lulls a half-time fill:
as I knife scrape the head from another pint,
he hovers, pocket-foothering his change.

Steadying for the ask, he addresses
my full frontals, my baby buggy bumpers,
my Brad Pitts, my boulders, my billabongs,

my squashy cushions, my soft-focus bristols,
my motherly bosoms, my matronly bulk,
my Mickey and Minnie, my Monica

Lewinskis, my Isaac Newtons,
my snow tyres, my speed bumps, my Tweedle Twins,
my milk-makers, my Mobutus, my num-nums,

my Pia Zadoras, my Pointer Sisters,
my honkers, my hooters, my hubcaps, my hummers,
my Eartha Kitts, my Eisenhowers,

my Gods milk bottles, my Picasso cubes,
my chesticles, my cha-chas, my coconuts,
my dairy pillows, my devil's dumplings,

my objectified orbs, my über-boobs,
my one-parts Lara, my two-parts globe,
my skywards pips, my lift and separate,

my airbags, my feeders, my mammy glands,
my Bob and Ray, my big bouncing Buddhas,
my sweater stretchers, my sweet potatoes,

my rosaceous rotors, my trusty rivets,
my melliferous melons, my mau-maus,
my tarty, my taut, my pert palookas,

my jahoobies, my kicking kawangas,
my agravic gobstoppers, my immodest maids,
my Scooby Snacks, my squished-in shlobes,

my cupcakes, my soda breads, my bloomin' baps,
my brilliant bangers, my brash bazookas,
my windscreen wipers, my Winnebagos,

my wopbopaloubop, wopbopalous,

my yahoos, my yazoos and yipping yin-yangs,
my paps, my pips, my pommes-de-terres,

my pushed-up, plunged-down, paraded balcony,
my slow reveal, my instant appeal,
my décolletage, my fool's mirage,

and I watch him pay up, steady up and leave.

The Angels' Share, 2012, Doghouse, also frequently performed with the Poetry Divas.
Published in **Catechism: Poems for Pussy Riot**, 2012.

<https://www.englishpen.org/events/catechism-poems-for-pussy-riot-live/>

Summiting

You must know the end to be convinced
that you can win the end, cool and quiet:
the solemn dome, fine and firm above all
its chasms of ice, its towers and crags,
this thing that all your desire points up to.
Here experience distils the muscle ache
and crystal skies into a bleary memory
of how you gained the top in so many days.
The conquered enemy is but ourselves.
Success means nothing here. Kingdoms of rock,
air, snow, and ice, we hold for just the time
it takes to survey in a slow circle,
soberly astonished by our struggle
to master mountains with our own flesh.

Mallory Sonnets, *The Angels' Share*, 2012. Doghouse books.
Southword Issue 18, 2010.

