Nostoc
Also by Daragh Breen

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Daragh Breen

Nostoc

Shearsman Books
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Nostoc: a mysterious jelly-like fungus that comes to the surface after periods of rain, and which has a host of common folk names, including witch's butter, star jelly, angel’s poultice, wind-salmon spawn, pig rosettes, mist roses, Jesus's blood, beggars’ pâté, paupers’ stew, and goblin hearts.
For Anne and Gerry
SAMPLER
Hymnal for Dogs

SAMPLER
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A pack of wolves swam the shortened Irish Sea between Scotland and Ireland, resting on drifting ice, following the scent of giant Irish deer that hung like autumn over the water, their howls like bells strung over a few miles of echoing waves.

Their wolf pups would later be stolen from them, and reared and crossbred with dogs to create the alpha Irish Wolfhound, a human-mapped aberration dreamt for the purpose of hunting their own wolf ancestors.

What followed was the echo to their destruction, clouding to feed on the red robes that they'd removed, garments which they in turn left fully emptied.

Magpies, hooded crows, ravens, doctored crows, crudely engineered crows, painted crows and Scriptures' crows... all crowding across a bridge of themselves.

So much so that by 2017 A.D., it had been widely accepted that Hibernia was the Corvid Capital of the Avian Empire.
SAMPLER
I. 1879, Kennel Club Annual Show, Dublin

It was Cromwell himself that had
set fire to the need in the dreams
of Captain George Augustus Graham
for the transmogrified original mongrel of
wolfe dogges, wolfdogs, wolfhounds;
and so he went about advertising for their
blood to re-gain possession of
what he believed to be his own soul,
using Oscar Wilde's father's surgical hands
to re-cast the breed, culling those
not self-culled by their own blue rot
of death and disease, and so his became the sole
entry in the fumbled together category
"nearest approach to the Old Irish Wolfhound".

Yet he ultimately found himself utterly
dismayed when, riverside, he stood
in the early morning January mist
and, his newly fashioned dogs silent
and unwilling to hunt, and watched
transfixed as a duck scratched the
surface beneath its yellowed webbed
feet, like a Christ suddenly begin to
doubt his own ability to walk on water.
II. Victorian

i

Out in his cobbled backyard
the Reverend Jack Russell watches
a goldfinch prepare for its own funeral,
muted by the stacks of ghost-white
dog hair that it snatches from the ground.

He has been breeding for a few seasons now,
miniaturising at every step, unpacking
the Russian Doll of a fox-hunting dog
from each of the discarded ghosts.
Every dawn and dusk he has watched
the local foxes steal their red cloven way
across the fields, the tinderbox
of their nerves scurrying for sanctuary
now that the covenant has been betrayed.
A fox slid out of the ivy hedging up ahead and stalled to stare at our two dogs, their leads harnessing them to a different world as a brief flame of sensation shimmered between all three, a flicker of startled memory.

Napkins of cloud were dragged through the pewter ring of the moon, napkin tied to napkin of night being hurried through, as a mutiny of crows harassed each other through a child’s broken drum and the cot lurched like a ship in hardening ice

– the nursery had been disturbed, and all three had fled their disrupted Eden.
One of the dogs came back out of the ditch head tilted upwards and proudly panting, his mouth stuffed with the ball of a staring rabbit’s head, its ears smoothly stiff, a medieval shuttlecock, perfectly and neatly severed, the veins neatly trimmed, as if the fox had just unscrewed and discarded it like a doll’s head of the kind that the same fox had dismantled the winter previous, stealing about the frozen fields in its clothes, the frilled hems being distracted and harassed by every thorned hedgerow.
III. Fox Donned the God-Head

Fox, wearing a God-Head mask, stood beside the boy and showed him;

Spring-revealed, the Earth inheriting the meek as angels, in their thousands, freefall before re-emerging from the waves with snatches of struggling silver.

Summer-revealed, the fossil-wingspan of the Milky Way, the dark's original mechanism of movement exposed now flaking and crumbling.

Autumn-revealed, all along the shore, thousands of gulls watching the ocean blooming and then withering, blooming and then withering blooming and then withering with every exhausted breath.

Winter-revealed, the dragon-life of some tress the silent wingspan of their roots
dormant
beneath the quiet fields,
but always in a state of waiting.

So, where to now?
asked the boy.

Note

It should be noted that there have been some problems associated with the donning of the God-Head. When Armstrong returned from the moon, he refused to remove the old deep-sea diving helmet that he’d travelled back through the Earth’s atmosphere encased in, suffering a kind of Lunar-Bends of the emotions, an ocean-weight of depression pulling on his every movement ever after.