The Orchard Keeper
Also by Susan Connolly

How High the Moon, 1991 (with Catherine Phil MacCarthy)
For the Stranger, 1993
Stone and Tree Sheltering Water: An Exploration of Sacred and Secular Wells in Co. Louth (with Anne-Marie Moroney), 1998
Race to the Sea, 1999
Ogham: Ancestors Remembered in Stone (with Anne-Marie Moroney), 2000
A Salmon in the Pool: The River Boyne from Source to Sea, A Map of Poetry and Placenames, 2001
Winterlight, 2002

from Shearsman Books

Forest Music, 2009
The Sun-Artist (chapbook), 2013
Bridge of the Ford, 2016
## Contents

### The Orchard Keeper

Francis Ledwidge 9  
At Ellie Vaughey’s Grave 10  
Matty McGoona’s Cottage, Donaghmore, Navan 11  
Francis Ledwidge Home on Leave, May 1916 13  
Ypres, July 1917 14  
The Orchard Keeper 15

### Woman in a Black Hat

Woman in a Black Hat 19  
Cycling to Renvyle 22  
Mornington 23  
The Beacons at Mornington 24  
Mother's Lonely Moments 25  
The Wine-Fountain 26

*Biography* 28
for
Fiona, Stephen, Rosemary and Tim
The Orchard Keeper
A five-acre garden, apples, cherries,  
Sunday crowds at ease.  
Children laughing, blackbirds  
sleeping, cherry-drunk.

Matty’s fiddle calms you,  
your thoughts read at a glance.  
You walk the tangled roads  
round Slane, dreaming of Ellie.

Homesick in Gallipoli.  
Home-rivers wonder where you are.  
Killed by shrapnel at Ypres.  
Empty roads are grieving.

Matty’s grave at Donaghmore,  
Ellie’s, on the Hill of Slane.  
At Rossnaree I saw you,  
sleeping by the Boyne.
At Ellie Vaughey’s Grave, Hill of Slane

Ellen O’Neill, died July 1915

Ellen, we know you better
as Ellie Vaughey, Frank Ledwidge’s
girl; all his poems for you
in autumn nineteen-twelve.

Mondays, on your way to work
at Power’s Drapery, Shop Street,
you handed in his ‘latest’
to the Drogheda Independent.

But then you married another.
Ellie Vaughey got married!
Frank wrote. That was a great blow,
perhaps the greatest of all.

One night at Basingstoke
he dreamed of white birds
flying over the Atlantic ocean,
woke to hear that you had died.

Your brothers brought you home,
and Rita, your infant daughter.
No mention of Francis Ledwidge,
who loved you.

Below the Abbey bell tower
seen from miles away,
dark branches sway
over your grave.
Matty McGoona’s Cottage, Donaghmore, Navan

*Christ! Matty it’s hard thinking on the old times. The pleasant Sundays we used to spend and the hopes we entertained!*

—in a letter from Francis Ledwidge to his friend Matty McGoona

1.

Late September, the smell of ripe apples filling this overgrown orchard where six horses graze near moss-covered cherry trees, I slip into another century where you, Matty McGoona, sit talking for hours with Frank.

2.

Or, nature-noting by the Boyne at Swynnerton, you return home at bedtime when Frank relaxes on his favourite seat near the fire and you describe stars and spiders, then listen closely to his poems all night in the warm kitchen.

3.

I see you thoughtful in your doorway (your rusty bicycle in a nearby ditch), reading the last letter Frank wrote you
before leaving for the war:

How is the violin? Every time you play
‘The Blackbird’ think on me. I love that tune
and snatches of it sing in my memory.

4.

He carried that tune across Europe,
until at Boesinghe, near Ypres, he died.
Later, when you played ‘The Blackbird’
you remembered Francis Ledwidge
calling to your door with a poem,
the two of you deep in talk, both still safe
from the harm brought by war.