Poetry and Sustainability
By Professor Frank J. Convery, Chairperson, Comhar Sustainable Development Council

Tuesday, 14th April 2009
In his latest monthly commentary, Professor Frank J. Convery, Chairperson of Comhar Sustainable Development Council, celebrates the 70th birthday of ‘the esteemed leader of the Irish literary parish’, Seamus Heaney.

Poetry is a timeless public good that we can all enjoy at minimal cost and at no pressure on environment or economy. A few verses of Flann O’Brien’s speak to a world suddenly bereft of material things, and in need of consolation:

When money's tight and hard to get
And your horse has also ran,
When all you have is a heap of debt –
A pint of plain is your only man.
When food is scarce and your larder bare
And no rashers grease your pan,
When hunger grows as your meals are rare –
A pint of plain is your only man.

And Orlagh O’Farrell reminds us of student days when loving and academic success didn’t always go hand in hand (‘Skylight’):

You
Take my hand and pull me to the room.
I laugh.
I love your country ways.
I’m failing my exams

And this is what poetry at its best provides – a short, sharp memorable insight into our world that makes us think and helps us smile. Few can match Samuel Beckett’s ability to create memorable speech:

The crocuses and the larch turning green every year a week before the others and the pastures red with uneaten sheep’s placentas and the long summer days and the newmown hay and the woodpigeon in the morning and the cuckoo in the afternoon and the corncrake in the evening and the wasps in the jam and the smell of gorse and the look of the gorse and the apples fall-ing and the children walking in the dead leaves and the larch turning brown a week before the others and the chestnuts falling and the howling winds and the sea breaking over the pier and the first fires and the hooves on the road and the consumptive postman whistling ‘The Roses are Blooming in Picardy’ and the standard oil lamp and of course the snow and to be sure the sleet and bless your heart the slush and every fourth year the February debacle and the endless April showers and the crocuses and then the whole bloody thing starting all over again [from Watt].

This week Ireland celebrates the 70th birthday of Seamus Heaney, a poet who we long ago recognised as special; the esteemed leader of the Irish literary parish. And the rest of the world caught up with us when his talents were given the ultimate global imprimatur in 1995: the Nobel Prize for Literature.
When you Google ‘Seamus Heaney Poetry’ the following comes up: ‘Results 1-10 of about 252,000 for Seamus Heaney poetry’. (This compares with ‘Search Results 1-10 of about 186,000 for Wordsworth poetry.)

Heaney resonates for many reasons. Making the transition from the farm and the physical to the urban and the cerebral represents the journey of a whole generation, and he captures it perfectly in his famous early poem ‘Digging’, which has him observing his father digging potatoes, and reminiscing about his grandfather cutting turf.

Under my window a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down...
My grandfather could cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, digging down and down
For the good turf. Digging.
And he comes back to his own life plan at the end:
Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

We empathise. Digging spuds and turf to make a living has its charms, but most prefer a warm room with a pencil (squat or otherwise) or computer. The several dozens of millions of Chinese who have recently made the migration from the paddy fields to the cities will see the point.

Another reason for the extreme affection in which Seamus Heaney is held is his lack of airs; an extraordinary man who can relate to the ordinary.

An Irish poet of an earlier generation, Patrick Kavanagh, makes the point that:

A poet is never one of the people, he is detached, remote, and the life of small time dances and talk about football would not be for him. He might take part, but he could not belong.

To do what he does, Heaney must also have the capacity to detach, but this essential distancing that must be part of his sensibility he keeps well hidden. He’s not exactly ‘one of the lads’, but he’s close enough not to intimidate. We feel somehow that he does belong; he is ‘one of us.’

My father came from Rocktown, on the border of Drumlamp and a mile from Bellaghy in south County Derry. ‘Convery’ is not a common name, but we abound in Gulladuff churchyard. And this is close enough to Heaney’s home-place of Mossbawn and the townlands of Tamniarn, The Creagh and Broagh to allow us to bask in his reflected glory; he dignifies our past by making our ancestral environs the world’s.

And this kind of sidling up to greatness is not unique to us – it is one of the charms of a small population that we all feel part of the Heaney penumbra. One of the nice things is that his birthday this week is a mass media event, not a topic for specialists, as might be the case in
the US, where the event would probably be safely tucked away on a thoughtful special on National Public Radio.

And he boosts our ego. Here he is writing about the early Celtic sensibility to nature:

*Early Irish nature poetry registers certain sensations and makes a springwater music out of certain feelings in a way unmatched in any other European language. Kuno Meyer...wrote: These poems occupy a unique position in the literature of the world. To seek out and watch and love Nature, in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest, was given to no people so early and so fully as the Celt.* [From: *Preoccupations: Selected Prose* 1968-1978, Faber and Faber, London and Boston]

**Daniel Boorstin** argues that:

*In a way, the most important things are the unnecessary things – great poems for example. What is most characteristic about humanity is our need for discovering the unnecessary.*

I can’t agree. In these hard times, we need to celebrate those poets who are necessary to keep us rooted and amused, who express what we think, who put those metaphorical rashers on the pan in times when frugality is the new necessity, and who give us the courage to face into ‘the whole bloody thing starting all over again’.

**Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005 (SI 279 of 2005)**

*Comhar SDC (Sustainable Development Council)* complies with the Regulations on the Re-use of Public Sector Information and we encourage the re-use of the information that we produce.

http://www.psi.gov.ie/

**Comhar** is the forum for national consultation and dialogue on all issues relating to sustainable development.

http://www.comharsdc.ie/

**The Heritage Council - New Website** - is designed to provide the wider public and people across the education, planning and policy spectrum with easily accessible information on all areas of the heritage sector. The website has extensive information on all areas of our national heritage including Archaeology, Architecture, Education, Museum and Archive, Inland Waterways, Marine, Recreation, Wildlife, Landscape, Irish Walled Towns, County Heritage Services and Planning.

Source : http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/

**Heritage Week 2009** takes place from 22nd – 30 August. To register your event log on to www.heritageweek.ie

All events must be registered by 31st May 2009 for inclusion in the Heritage Week Event Guide, which will be distributed in advance of the week throughout Ireland and Europe.

**Sustainable Dublin, Ireland**

The City of Dublin is the capital of Ireland and the country's largest city. With almost a third of Ireland’s population living in the greater Dublin area, the city’s staff are responsible for maintaining thousands of kilometers of roadways, water pipes and sewers. Since January 2008, Dublin City Council (DCC) has been working to mobilise the staff’s intelligence and creativity toward strategic, organisational sustainability using The Natural Step Framework.

Learning for Sustainability (LfS)
The site highlights the wide range of networks, forums, processes and social skills available internationally to support constructive collaboration. The site structure shows how these elements can work together, and collectively brings links to several hundred annotated on-line resources together in one easy to access site.
Source: http://learningforsustainability.net/

Change In Start Date of Tubber Talks
Due to unforeseen circumstances BurrenLIFE has had to reschedule the first talk in the upcoming series of talks in Tubber. The series will now commence on Thursday 16th April with Dr. James Moran (BLP / Teagasc). The scheduled talk for 9th April will now take place on the 7th May 2009. BurrenLIFE apologises for any inconvenience caused.

The series will now take place from the 16th April to 7th May 2009. The venue for the talks is the Community Hall, Tubber, Co. Clare and all talks will commence at 8.30pm. Admission to the talks is free of charge.

The first talk will take place on Thursday the 16th April. Dr. James Moran (Teagasc / BurrenLIFE) will be the guest speaker and his talk is called “Farming For Conservation in the East Burren”. Dr. James Moran is from a farming background in Co. Mayo. He is employed as an Ecology / Conservation expert in the environment advisory section of Teagasc (Athenry) and has been involved with BurrenLIFE since the project started. His talk will focus on the practical measures of farming for conservation in the East Burren and other High Nature Value (HNV) farmland areas.

“A Sense of Place In Time — documenting our local heritage” is the title of the third talk in the series and will take place on the 23rd April. Zena Hoctor’s talk will consist of an overall review of the heritage of the Burren but will then focus in on the local area and how the local community including local school children can explore and document their local heritage. Zena is a self-employed heritage consultant. Her particular interest is the interpretation of local landscapes from the past to the present.

The series will conclude on Thursday the 30th April with a talk by Shane Casey (Burren Farmer) and Ruairí Ó Conchúir (BurrenLIFE) entitled “Farming in a time of social and industrial change across the Burren”. Shane Casey comes from a strong farming background in Fanore. His talk will outline how agricultural change has reflected social and industrial changes including how REPS has changed from the protection of habitats to their enhancement and how economic growth impacted on the availability of farm labour with the resultant impact on scrub encroachment and land management. Ruairí Ó Conchúir, is Finance & Operations Officer with BurrenLIFE and his input will focus on the work of BurrenLIFE in promoting farming for conservation over the past five years.

The final guest speaker on the 7th May will be Tony Diviney. The talk is entitled “The Holy Wells of Beagh Parish”. Tony is a Tubber-based farmer who is heavily involved with the Beagh Integrated Rural Development Association. He will outline how a rural community in the parish of Beagh (Tubber) worked to restore the great vernacular religious sites of the parish, the holy wells, to their former glory.

The final element of the Tubber Heritage Education Programme is a children's art nature workshop with Gordon D'Arcy. This will take place on the 21st April @ 9.20am. It will
involve Tubber and Boston national schools and is open to other local children by prior booking only.

Further information regarding the talks may be obtained from the BurrenLIFE Project website www.burrenlife.com or from 065 708 9000 or mobile 087 292 5487 or email info@burrenlife.com

> **An Taisce Kulyana Project**

*Community Combating Climate Change*  
**Eanna ni Lamhna**  
President of **An Taisce**  
Lecturing on “Biodiversity and Climate Change”  
On Tuesday 5th May at 8.30 p.m.  
Great Hall, Temple Gate Hotel, Ennis.

There will be exhibits and stands of like-minded voluntary organisations and entrance is free.

Contact: KULYANA@iol.ie  
Mobile phone number 086-197 6104  
We are continuing to hold exhibitions in libraries around Clare, and for those of you in West Clare, please note that we will in Kilrush and Kilkee from the 20th April to 1st May.

> Weekend in the Woods, Bealkelly Oak Woods, Tuamgraney, Co. Clare  
9th & 10th May 2009  
CELT (Centre for Environmental Living & Training)  
Weekend in the Woods, Bealkelly Oak Woods, Tuamgraney, Co Clare  
16 Traditional Skills & Heritage Crafts incl. youngsters courses (8yrs +).  
Courses include: Herblore / Sugan Chair / Greenwood Furniture / New Course! Fishing for Beginners / Dry Stone Walling / Woodcarving / Silversmithing / Felting / New Course! Tool Restoration / Natural Building / Basketry / Blacksmithing / Spinning & Weaving / Coppersmithing / Stonecarving / Woodcrafts & Felting & Rustic Art for 8-14yrs  
Cost: 150 euro (100 euro concession) + 15 euro annual membership  
web: www.celtnet.org  
email: info@celtnet.org  
Tel: 061 640 765

> **Fadó Fadó...long, long ago in Ireland...** a series of stories about Life In Rural Ireland in the first half of the 20th century as told by members of the Ballinasloe Active Retirement Association. Ballinasloe Active Retirement Association is a vibrant community of older people living in or near Ballinasloe, the largest town in east Galway, Ireland  
*Source:* http://www.irishfadofado.com/

> **Ballinasloe Active Retirement Association Online**  
Founded in March 2002, the Association now has 150 members.  
Our aim is to enhance the physical, social & psychological well-being of retired people in the Ballinasloe area. Through our range of programmes, we encourage our members to enjoy life, maintain their independence, cultivate social contacts, make new friends, acquire new skills, share experiences & continue to contribute to the community.  
*Source:* http://ballinasloeactive-retirement.blogspot.com/
borderlands - e-journal - a virtual intellectual space for new forms of thought and writing in the humanities. borderlands is a refereed international journal that aims to promote trans-disciplinary work across the humanities, work which might also intersect with diverse practices and sites in culture, policy and everyday life. 
Source : http://www.borderlands.net.au/

this place is... a place, unlike a “city” which has prescriptive boundaries, is a more subjective term: a place is defined by your experiences and perceptions. A place could mean a street or a neighborhood, but it could also mean some other, more nebulous region that’s defined by some shared characteristic. 
Source : http://www.thisplaceis.com/

Call It Home - The disc explores the hyper-capitalistic partnership between the federal government and private enterprise in the 30's wherein suburban residential fabric became a currency, an economic indicator, and major U.S. industry not unlike the automobile. In an exaggerated version of the long-standing American tradition of abstracting something as specific as land into a generic product, this period produced not only the assembly line house, but the assembly-line site. The material attempts to complicate the typically amnesic perception of suburbia as a mid-twentieth century tract house phenomenon, resetting the beginning of this trend in the thirties and looking at the many waves of suburban growth which this more recent chapter obscured. 

Ecology and Society - an electronic, peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary journal devoted to the rapid dissemination of current research. We view humanity and nature as co-evolving systems that interact within the bounds of the biosphere at various temporal and spatial scales and across scales. 
Source : http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/

Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research is New Zealand's foremost environmental research organisation specialising in sustainable management of land resources optimising primary production, enhancing biodiversity, increasing the resource efficiency of businesses, and conserving and restoring the natural assets of our communities. 
Source : http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz

Cultural Landscapes Bibliography
A - J | K - R | S - Z
The Cultural Landscape Bibliography is an ongoing project associated with American Studies 851: Interpretation of Cultural Landscapes. The bibliography was compiled by Mary Corbin Sies, Gilda Anroman, Claudia Rector, and Krista Park, with the present annotations contributed by the students in the fall 1997, 1999, and 2001 classes. Additional annotations will be added by future classes. 
Source : http://www.amst.umd.edu/Research/cultland/index.html
The Blog of Henry David Thoreau
"It was a pleasure and a privilege to walk with him. He knew the country like a fox or a bird, and passed through it as freely by paths of his own.... One must submit abjectly to such a guide, and the reward was great." - Emerson
Source : http://blogthoreau.blogspot.com/

Where London Stood
Much of the rural imagery from the works of the Romantics included aestheticised, picturesque ruins from a previous age (usually, although not always, Classical temples, columns and statues). It occurred to me that the image of a well-known city in ruins was a powerful one that people might use in a variety of ways to express a variety of ideas. What does it mean? Why the fascination?
Source : http://traumwerk.stanford.edu:3455/71/29

Savage Minds - is a collective web log devoted to both bringing anthropology to a wider audience as well as providing an online forum for discussing the latest developments in the field. We are a group of Ph.D. students and professors teaching and studying anthropology and are excited to share it with you.
Source : http://savageminds.org/

The European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp) is concerned with intensifying networking among actors in the cultural field. It participates in their transversal practices of cooperation and develops their processual discourses on the arts and on the instruments of cultural policies.
Source : http://eipcp.net/institute

The European Resistance Archive is a space in which individual stories of people having resisted against the terror, humiliation and despair fascism brought over Europe are kept alive and visible for everybody.
The European Resistance Archive will enable the documentation of this precious knowledge. It offers video interviews with women and men having taken part in the antifascist resistance.
Source : http://www.resistance-archive.org/

Addressing Gender-based Violence
UNFPA Strategy and Framework for Action
Author: UNFPA
Publication date: 2009
This publication identifies priority areas for intensified action on gender-based violence: policy frameworks, data collection and analysis, focus on sexual and reproductive health, humanitarian responses, adolescents and youth, men and boys, faith-based networks, and vulnerable and marginalized populations. It is intended to provide a common platform and technical guidance for UNFPA at country, regional and global levels and effectively guide capacity-development initiatives, resources and partnerships.
Source : http://www.unfpa.org/