

Poems by Michael Longley

Puff-Ball

When we picked mushrooms at midnight
Among intersecting fairy rings,
You said moonlight had ripened them.

Later I found the moon's image –
The full moon's – a giant puff-ball
Taking shape as in a low cloud.

Notebook

Why did I never keep a notebook
That filled up with reed buntings
And blackcaps and chiffchaffs, their
Songs a subsong between the lines?

Early April. I am seventeen.
Under an overhanging whin bush
I have spotted linnets building.
A robin has laid her first egg.

Firewood

Out of the darkness and
Up the spiral staircase
I am carrying logs,
An armful every day,
Firewood for winter when
I shall not be here – wild
Fig perhaps – white sap
For curing warts, scrotum-
Concealing leaves – blackthorn,
Chestnut – for all I know –
From the skinny waterfall,
Antique olive branches,
Sycamore, mulberry –
At the back of the wood pile
Underneath the *casa*
Logs that will never burn
Disintegrating year
By year, forgetfulness,
Woodlouse, scorpion.

Tongue Orchid

I pass the first dilapidated
Chestnut that holds in its leaves
The waterfall's hurlygush,
When you call me back
Through tangles of paradise
Lily, bastard balm,
Nightshade, vetch to our very
First wasp-seducing
Tongue orchid, brownish red
Napkins neatly folded
As for a love-feast:
Why can't we find a name
For purple candelabra
And dusk-stars like signals
To amorous fireflies, yet
So white in their thicket
They mark the path ending
And things coming to an end?

Michael Longley, a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy since 2009, is one of Ireland's most prominent contemporary poets. His recent poetry collections include "The Weather in Japan" (2000), "Snow Water" (2004), and "Collected Poems" (2007). His newest collection, "A Hundred Doors," was published by Jonathan Cape in 2011. "Puff-Ball," "Notebook," "Firewood," and "Tongue Orchid," © 2011 by Michael Longley.
