

**39th Annual National Conference of the
American Irish Teachers Association**

Well Versed

A Celebration of Poetry from Ireland and America

Presenters:

**poets Terence Winch, Sean Nevin, and Connie Roberts
musicians Jerry O'Sullivan and Niamh Hyland
arts journalist Earle Hitchner**

Organizers and Hosts:

AITA President Doris Marie Meyer and Earle Hitchner

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Saturday, November 8, 2014

Liederkranz

**6 East 87th Street (between Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue)
New York, NY 10128**

**For registration or other information, contact
Doris Marie Meyer at dorismeyer@aol.com or 917-691-2883**

INTRODUCTION

AITA President Doris Marie Meyer

EIRE CRAFT: POETRY IN IRELAND AND IRISH AMERICA

Earle Hitchner

with special musical guest Jerry O'Sullivan



“Enough is not enough when it comes to poetry,” the late Seamus Heaney, Ireland’s most prominent poet since Yeats, said in an interview. But as Irish-American poet Billy Collins remarked to an audience in Connecticut this past April, “One of the ridiculous aspects of being a poet is the huge gulf between how seriously we take ourselves and how generally we are ignored by everybody else.” Not to be ignored, the state of poetry, Irish poetry, and Irish-American poetry will be discussed in Earle’s opening presentation. It will conclude with a medley of Ulster tunes performed by his longtime friend, Jerry O’Sullivan, in honor of the great

County Derry-born poet Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), whom AITA will honor throughout the conference.

Earle will play a Seamus Heaney poem recited by Heaney himself: "Digging"

Called "arguably the pre-eminent Celtic critic in this country" by *The Boston Globe*, **Earle Hitchner** has written more than 2,000 articles, reviews, columns, book essays, and liner notes for recordings, including the Boston Pops Orchestra's Grammy-nominated *The Celtic Album*. He has written for *The Best American Poetry* blog, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Billboard*, *The Oxford American*, MTV's *Sonicnet*, *Irish Echo*, *Irish Voice*, *Irish America*, *Irish Music*, *Journal of the Society for American Music*, *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, and *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*. Among the Irish and Irish-American authors he has interviewed and/or written about are poets Ciarán Carson and Billy Collins, memoirist Frank McCourt, novelist and short-story author Bernard Mac Laverty, and historian Terry Golway. Earle has a M.A. in English from CUNY Lehman College and a B.A. *maxima cum laude* in English-Education from La Salle University. He has taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Marist College, CUNY Lehman College, and Drew University, where he is a doctoral student now writing his dissertation on contemporary poetry. A native Philadelphian who has also lived in northern New Jersey and in New York, Earle currently resides in southern New Jersey. His distant Irish lineage comes from his father's side of the family.

DIVINING THE POEM: POETIC INTUITION AND THE NATURAL WORLD **Sean Nevin**



"It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top," Virginia Woolf noted in *A Room of One's Own*. Sean's presentation will discuss the act of conjuring in poetry and examine metaphor revealed from nature and other worldly places with a poet's perspective. His presentation will also draw on other poems that divine the natural world—with a focus on Seamus Heaney and others.

Sean will recite Seamus Heaney's poem "A Basket of Chestnuts"

Sean Nevin is the author of two volumes of verse, *Oblivio Gate* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008) and *A House That Falls* (Slapering Hol Press, 2005). His honors include a Literature Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Prize for Poetry, the Alsop Review Poetry Prize, the Katherine C. Turner Academy of American Poets University Prize, and two fellowships from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. His poetry has appeared in such journals as *The Gettysburg Review*, *North American Review*, and *The Journal of the American Medical*

Association (JAMA), and in the anthology *New Voices from the Academy of American Poets' University and College Prizes*. His poetry and interviews have been featured on the syndicated National Public Radio programs *The Story with Dick Gordon* and *Speaking of Faith* with Krista Tippett. Sean has a MFA in poetry from Arizona State University, a M.A. in literature and creative writing from CUNY Queens College, and a B.A. in English literature from La Salle University. He currently directs the MFA Program in Poetry and Poetry in Translation at Drew University in Madison, N.J. Born in Jersey City, N.J., Sean is a third-generation Irish American who solidified his love of poetry while attending workshops in Dublin with poets Paula Meehan, Theo Dorgan, Pat Boran, and others.

THIS WAY IN: POEMS AND SONGS ABOUT IRELAND OVER HERE Terence Winch



Terence Winch's writing provides a "last glimpse of the culture of twentieth-century Irish immigrants in America as their first-generation American-born children witnessed it," according to Jack Morgan's book *New World Irish*. Through his verse, music, and stories in his presentation, Terence will re-conjure that Irish-American experience, particularly the New York City version he grew up in.

Terence will recite Seamus Heaney's poem "The Singer's House"

The Bronx-born son of Irish immigrant parents, writer and musician **Terence Winch** received an honorary doctorate of humane letters on May 17, 2014, from Iona College, where he had earned a B.A. *summa cum laude*. Terence also has a M.A. with honors from Fordham University. His seven books of poetry are *This Way Out* (Hanging Loose Press, 2014); *Lit from Below* (Salmon Press, Ireland, 2013); *Falling out of Bed in a Room with No Floor* (HLP, 2009); *Boy Drinkers* (HLP, 2007), which focuses on his upbringing in Irish Catholic New York; *The Drift of Things* (The Figures, 2001); *The Great Indoors* (Story Line Press, 1995), which won the Columbia Book Award; and *Irish Musicians/American Friends* (Coffee House Press, 1985), which won an American Book Award. *That Special Place: New World Irish Stories* (HLP, 2004), a collection of nonfiction pieces, centers on his life in Irish music, primarily with the original Celtic Thunder, the band he founded with his brother Jesse in 1977. In 2007 Terence released a CD compilation of his Irish compositions entitled *When New York Was Irish*, named after his best-known song. His verse has appeared in such anthologies as *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, *The Best American Poetry*, and *Poetry 180*, and in such periodicals as *The Paris Review*, *The American Poetry Review*, and *The New Republic*. Several of his poems have been read by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac*, broadcast on XM

Satellite Radio and to more than 2.5 million listeners on nearly 400 public radio stations each day. Terence maintains close ties with his relatives in counties Galway and Clare.

LITTLE WITNESS: SET THE DARKNESS ECHOING
Connie Roberts
with special musical guests Jerry O'Sullivan and Niamh Hyland



In his poem “Personal Helicon” Seamus Heaney writes: “I rhyme / to see myself, to set the darkness echoing.” In *Little Witness*, her recently completed collection of poetry, Connie Roberts rhymes to see *herself*, from her days growing up in an industrial school (orphanage) in Ireland’s midlands to her emigration to the United States. Besides exploring her own history, she sets the darkness echoing on the wider history of others within the industrial school system. Through his instrumental mastery Jerry O’Sullivan will extend each poem’s resonance as it moves in the same direction emotionally. Singer Niamh Hyland will memorialize an orphanage inmate in the song “I Dreamt I Saw Peter Tyrrell Last Night,” comprising Connie’s original lyrics set to the melody of the 1930s ballad “I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night.”

Connie will recite Seamus Heaney’s poem “The Tollund Man”

The poetry of **Connie Roberts**, a County Offaly native who emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1983, has been published in the anthology *Toward Forgiveness*, the literary journal *Irish Pages*, and other European and U.S. periodicals. During this past summer she won the Boyle Arts Festival Poetry Competition, and in 2013 she received the Poetry Collection Award at the Listowel Writers’ Week Festival. In 2010 Connie received the Patrick Kavanagh Award for *Not the Delft School*, a collection of poetry inspired by her experiences growing up in an industrial school (orphanage) in the Irish midlands, and also won first prize in the Dromineer Literary Festival Poetry Competition. She has additionally won a Literature Bursary Award from the Irish Arts Council, a space in the Poetry Ireland Introductions Series, and a nomination for the Hennessy X.O. Literary Awards, and been a finalist in the Strokestown International Poetry Competition, the Fish Poetry Prize, the Dana Awards, and the iYeats Poetry Competition (twice). A member of Artists Without Walls, Connie has a B.A. *summa cum laude* and a M.A. in English literature and creative writing from New York’s Hofstra University, where she teaches in the creative writing program of the English Department and is part of the Irish Studies Program.

A capstone honor for **Jerry O’Sullivan**, America’s premier uilleann piper, was his induction into Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann’s Mid-Atlantic Region Hall of Fame in 2012.



Born in New York City to an Irish-American mother and a father from Dublin, Ireland, Jerry is also a superb tin whistle, low whistle, flute, highland pipes, border pipes, and Scottish smallpipes player. He has appeared on more than 90 albums and performed or recorded with James Galway, Colorado Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops Orchestra, Don Henley, Dolly Parton, Joe Derrane, and many others. Jerry was a featured soloist on Paul Winter's Grammy Award-winning album *Celtic Solstice* in 1999 and appears on the soundtracks for the films *From Shore to Shore*, *The Long Journey Home*, *Far and Away*, *Out of Ireland*, and *Africans in America*. His own four solo albums—

O'Sullivan Meets O'Farrell, Vol. II, in 2010, *O'Sullivan Meets O'Farrell* in 2005, *The Gift* in 1998, and *The Invasion* in 1987—have all received critical acclaim. Jerry has a B.A. in English from Iona College and is now pursuing a M.A. in Irish and Irish American Studies at New York University.

Jerry will recite Seamus Heaney's poem "Bogland"

Born in Drumshanbo, County Leitrim, singer **Niamh Hyland** found her passion for the arts at an early age. She was 17 when she was accepted into the Royal Irish Academy of Music for vocal studies. Niamh received a vocal scholarship to University College Dublin and received degrees in both business and legal studies. In 2008 she was admitted to the New York State Bar and currently works for a management consulting firm as a facilitator, coach, and lead of global communications for its learning and development team. A co-founder of Artists Without Walls, Niamh was chosen by the *Irish Echo* for its "Top 40 Under 40" awards in 2013. She has toured Europe and the U.S. as the lead singer of the rock band Lily Sparks. Notable venues for the band or for Niamh's solo performances include Manhattan's Webster Hall, Lincoln Center's Ourland Festival, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland.

Niamh will recite Seamus Heaney's poem "The Given Note"

SCHEDULE FOR NOV. 8, 2014

9:00 to 9:45 a.m.: registration / Continental breakfast

10:00 a.m.: AITA President Doris Marie Meyer

10:15 a.m.: Earle Hitchner with Jerry O'Sullivan

11:00 a.m.: Sean Nevin

11:45 a.m.: break

12:00 p.m.: Terence Winch

12:45 p.m.: gourmet luncheon (book and album shopping with LOGOS)

2:15 p.m.: Connie Roberts with Jerry O'Sullivan and Niamh Hyland

3:00 p.m.: presenters' panel discussion / audience Q&A / book and album signing

4:00 p.m.: reception with wine and hors d'oeuvres