

# Trip

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Text © Kathy D’Arcy 2023

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To learn more about the project visit [portspastpresent.eu](http://portspastpresent.eu)

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Ports, Past and Present focuses on the five port towns which still run ferry services between Ireland and Wales: Pembroke Dock, Rosslare Harbour, Fishguard, Dublin Port and Holyhead. It envisages the Irish Sea not as a space which separates our two countries, but a rich and storied heritage, full of journeys and connections. During the course of the project, researchers from the University of Cork, the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth University and Wexford County Council worked with the port communities to bring the past to life through stories, films, apps, and twelve creative commissions.

The poet Kathy D’Arcy’s commission focused on Pembroke Dock in south Wales. Walking through different places is at the core of her creative practice as a writer, but during the Covid pandemic Kathy instead had to rely on virtual ‘walks’ taken with local volunteers through videoconferencing apps. As restrictions on travel gradually lifted, Kathy found herself able to visit Pembroke Dock in person for the first time in 2022. The poem ‘Trip’ charts that voyage from Ireland to Wales, while ‘Autotranscribe Writes an Ode to Pembroke Dock’ reflects some of the ‘mistakes’ made by the software that Kathy was using when transcribing her virtual interviews with local people.

Kathy can be heard reading her poems online using the codes below.



Trip



Autotranscribe Ode



More content by  
Kathy D’Arcy for  
Ports, Past and  
Present

<https://creative-connections.pubpub.org/kathydarcy>

<http://www.kathydarcy.com/>

Things change at the edges, someone said on the bus.  
I think that farther inland, there's something,  
some nothing. It's not necessarily good,

it's edge – even the universe must have one.  
Someone wants maps to show only the coast,  
where the real edges are, the real meetings.

The unexpected closeness of underway travellers – three  
foot passengers, two port staff – it feels like we know each other.  
The echo-fluorescent waiting space.

At the start I learn that ferries and spaceships vibrate  
at the frequency of Autistic peace,

that cutlery shudders in canteen drawers  
like the sound of a Lego Millennium Falcon's  
downfall. We're here.

If you arrive by sea in the dark you must wait  
for the town to assemble itself  
piece by piece with the sunrise, hatching  
from little streetlight eggs into silent houses  
that themselves will hatch into people like  
the start of Under Milk Wood, like being caught  
in The Enchanted Tree at switching time.

I arrive by sea in the dark. In the sweet, wet, almost  
touchable smell of old trees. The town is silent,  
deserted apart from rumbling trucks – my shipmates.

Apart from two people screaming at each other somewhere nearby.

I will find things here that I miss from home, like

Conkers  
 Nettles  
 Nettle stings  
 Blackberries  
 Holly  
 Colonial decay  
 Sloes, which my father  
 (who has Irish names for some things  
 but doesn't know that he's speaking Irish) calls 'hurts'  
 Clover  
 Those neatly terraced  
 seaside houses with bay windows  
 A particular kind of path  
 Brambles  
 Train tracks  
 Double yellow lines  
 Pillar postboxes (painted red  
 instead of green but  
 the same)  
 Magpies  
 A particular kind of hill  
 A particular kind of mud  
 A particular kind of wall  
 A particular kind of military fort  
 because

we did this before you then painted it green, tore up railtracks,  
 tried to let the footprints of empire fade in the sand, let the  
 footprints of empire into the water, I know these bittersweet  
 silhouettes, I know these bricks, these windows, these buildings,  
 these walls, I know how to sneak into their bones, they are not  
 as long dead here, but dead all the same –

near my home are three forts exactly like this.  
 In one children play with cannons, another is ruined,  
 another a museum. We make films in them, we make  
 money from them. We're not sure about them,  
 but the views are magnificent. We like to rename them.



Sometimes on the map the roads don't even show up.

A family lives in the tower on top of which  
is the only gun that fired on the German fighters;

all of this means more than it did when I started,  
now that we are naming gunpowder again.  
An old man screams at his runaway dogs, still genteel,  
and I approach the port from the beach but the gates are closed.

I approach the port from the hill, the ornate main entrance  
between the ruined gatehouse and the pristine one.  
I approach the turns I might not be meant to take,  
the beaten path, the low chain fence, the wasteland,  
the paths behind ruined buildings and pristine ones,  
the long straight road with the high wire gate,  
the sign saying MOD KEEP OUT,  
my accent, my mouth sealed shut with wet sand.

The signs:

Max trench width  
Home of Interclamp  
I love you Kelly  
I love you MOD  
Beware marine security searches.

Two men in a shed at the very back  
where paths end in piles of old cars and brambles.  
That's the pickling pond over there, they tell me.  
This is as close as I get. I can't see if it's gone.  
They filled it in, the men say. I'm not sure  
if the grey hill I see in the distance is what they mean.

I am trying all the turns, I am finding all the gates,  
I am exploring like a gas, touching all the space  
that I can. I am retracing my steps in the crystal sun.  
The sand in my mouth is turning to airy dust.



*I am feeling my way up a path slippery with  
 leaves, I am deciding to take the left fork  
 (I am deciding to take the right fork), I  
 am stumbling out of the undergrowth to find  
 a fire engine in a lane, I am tiptoeing  
 under the motorway bridge to  
 the water's edge, I am teetering on the edge  
 of the last step before dropping onto the gravel beach,  
 I am falling hard on my hip on smooth wet rocks  
 and daring an unknown tide,  
 I am saying hello in as unaccented a way  
 as I can, I am huffing across the  
 golf course, I am meeting the same  
 small roundabout too many times, I am tracing  
 each road in the grid of town, I am passing  
 another church, I am passing another  
 closed shop, I am hiding my newsagent sandwich  
 from seagulls' mouths, I am accidentally  
 in the back of an industrial estate, I am on purpose  
 in the wasteland behind the train station, I am high up  
 behind the houses, I am jumping into the road  
 from a small hill, I am finding the port  
 at the start and end of all roads*

The haunted scaffold redbrick, monstrous in the dark  
 is more like Thomas the Tank Engine's house in daylight.

I am leaving, and  
 Brexit will not cut my phone off much longer.  
 Was this that mythical island, that one you made up?

