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ILONA MARTONFI

Skibbereen Workhouse

Walk by the An Aighlinn River,
past St. Patrick's Cathedral church
sculpted tympanum, a belfry

look at the bakehouse and washhouse.
Infirmary. Idiots' ward. The dining hall.

Oh gentry of Skibbereen.

no photographs of the famine exist
black and white images of evictions
razed turf and stone houses

no calotype negatives

spinning flax into thread
a hay card, a horse
ships of departing immigrants

cottiers renting land is what was.
But what is home?
Potato ridges among bogs and rocks
tubers rotting on the stalk.

Oh gentry of Skibbereen.

beyond the workhouse
under an old yew tree, wild blackberry brambles,
men, women, and children buried not in coffins.
No gravestones. Nothing to inscribe names.

The grey of late November.

Ilona Martonfi has published four poetry books, Blue Poppy (2009), Black Grass (2012), The Snow Kimono (2015), and Salt Bride (2019). Her forthcoming works include The Tempest (2021). Her writing appears in five chapbooks, anthologies, and various magazines. She is also the artistic director of Visual Arts Centre Reading Series and Argo Bookshop Reading Series and the recipient of the QWF 2010 Community Award.