

# Poet Michael Longley – inspired by Donegal

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**It was a caravan holiday to Donegal with his parents and twin brother that started it all...**

Michael Longley's father got lost when he misread the map and they pulled in to park for the night in the dark by the roadside just beyond Carrigart.

They had no idea that they had just a few miles still to travel to their destination in Downings on the Rosguill Peninsula.

In this first volume of The Poet's Chair, the distinguished Irish poet Michael Longley (pictured) – whose poetry has transcended political and cultural boundaries throughout his career – reflects on what has influenced his craft. Belfast-born Longley opens with an 'autobiography in poetry' where he recounts the poets and poems and places that have influenced him as both a reader and writer of poetry.

And one of those places is his beloved Donegal.

Longley recalls: “I woke in the morning to a revelation, my first glimpse of wilderness in the Atlantic light. At that moment I discovered my soul-landscape.

“Close to the seashore at Downings we camped on some grassy machair, our caravan an eyesore for miles around. I would sit on the headland and write ecstatic letters to friends in Belfast about the view across Sheephaven Bay to Marble Strand and Muckish. “Looking back at my passionate desire to share the landscape, I think I can recognize the incipient poet – someone for whom no experience is complete until he or she has written about it, someone who would hope to share the experience with others.”

Longley describes Tra-na-Rossan as “the first great yellow strand to fill my imagination”.

It was this stretch of beach that inspired him as a 19-year-old to write his first love poem to the

Western – or Northwestern) landscape.

*We walked on Tra-na-Rossan strand;  
The Atlantic winds were wiping the heat  
From the August sun and the stretching sand  
Was cold beneath our naked feet*

Longley goes on to discuss his close relationships with Derek Mahon and the late Seamus Heaney, another lover of Donegal, as well as other poets from around the world.

The second piece in the book explores the huge influence of the classical literature of Greece and Rome on poetry written in English.

It also highlights how Longley uses this literature in his own work – often to portray the Troubles in the North.

The title closes with a very personal discussion about how the west of Ireland has had a deep



impact on his poetry, his life, and his 'spiritual education'.

His love of nature and the environment shines through and extracts from his poems portray his deep understanding of the West. One Wide Expanse gives readers a rare insight into the creative process of one of Ireland's leading contemporary poets who was Ireland Professor of Poetry from 2007 to 2010.

Michael Longley was educated in Belfast and went on to study Classics at Trinity College, Dublin. His most recent

collection The Stairwell (2014) won this year's Griffin Poetry Award. He is married to Edna Longley, a critic of modern poetry, and they have three children.

## KEY ELEMENT

The Ireland Chair of Poetry has, since 1998, been a key element in the promotion, discussion and encouragement of poetry – both its practitioners and readers – across the island of Ireland. John Montague, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Paul Durcan, Michael Longley, Harry Clifton have all held the role of Ireland Professor of Poetry for three years each, with Paula Meehan the current Professor until 2016. As part of their role, each Professor of Poetry gives a public lecture each year. \* One Wide Expanse by Michael Longley is the first volume in The Poet's Chair series from UCD Press which will publish the public lectures of each of the three most recent Ireland Professors of Poetry.

## Big Donegal attendance expected at protest

Hundreds of people from Donegal are making their way to Dublin for the anti-water charges protest on Saturday.

Anti-water charges activist Charlie McDyer of Ballybofey says the level of interest is “outstanding”.

“I think people have had enough at this stage,” she told the Democrat. The demand for leaflets has been amazing, they've had to print more.

“Irish Water is a farce. The way the government keep putting more and more money into it is just making people angrier.”

At least five buses will be leaving Donegal early on Saturday morning - from West Donegal, Letterkenny, Lifford, West Donegal and Ballyshannon. Many others are planning to make their own way to Dublin.

Right2Water is organising the protest. Participants will assemble at Heuston and Connolly train stations at 2pm and make their way from there to the GPO.

More than 6,000 people have already confirmed that they will be taking part.

# A tidal wave of employment?

A major feasibility study on examining Donegal as a hub for tidal energy is set to get underway.

If the rivers and coast of the county are deemed suitable for producing such hydro-energy, it could lead to many new jobs in rural areas, a company spokesman has stated.

James Donegan, the Irish representative for energy firm, Ocean Renewable Pow-

er Company Ireland Ltd, says a similar project in the USA created up to 100 jobs, both directly and indirectly, with the construction of a tidal energy plant in the state of Maine. James, who is originally from Cork and has family connections in the Dungloe area, has just returned from living and working in Maine and says the study will help them identify the potential for this type of

technology in the area.

“In some ways Donegal is similar to Maine in the north east of the US where they have projects Lubec and Eastport, which were major fishing ports, and this helped create over 100 jobs directly and indirectly in the area,” he explained.

He said they also have a policy of employing local contractors to carry out the

work at the sites in Maine and Alaska and this policy would continue where possible if they were to establish a base in Donegal. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) recently awarded ORPC Ireland, Ltd. funding to conduct a feasibility assessment to identify tidal energy opportunities suitable for development in the coastal waters of County Donegal.

Donegal County Council's Michael Heaney, Director of Community, Culture & Development Planning Services said: “Donegal County Council welcomes this initiative and very much looks forward to continued partnership with ORPC in advancing the ocean renewable energy sector in the North West of Ireland.”

For more information, visit [www.orpc.co](http://www.orpc.co).

## Stop the Donegal 'brain drain'

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“But if I can do my bit I would like to see is the government also getting it's act together and coming up with a few innovative ideas to sell Donegal to these people.

“They should be encouraging people to come back home by introducing tax breaks for new business start up; low mortgages rates for returning emigrants; capital tax reductions for business which establish in rural areas. Basically, they should be saying we'll invest in you for five years or so to get your business up and running. It's a sort of quid pro quo - you invest in us, we invest in you. And everyone wins.”

Mr Casey concluded that there was a huge pool of young, talented people in Donegal and Derry that could bring about regeneration but it would be Australia or Canada that would be getting the benefit of that talent unless some pretty radical steps were taken very soon to address what he described as 'the brain drain' from these parts.

Mr Casey is understood to be still considering a final decision on running in the General Election.

# Reunion for 1990 Ballyshannon Community Games champions

There will be a reunion this Saturday 29th August in Bridgend Bar for the 1990 Donegal and All-Ireland winning Community Games team of Aodh Ruadh.

The team who won the county title that year were Stephen Ward, Paul Rafferty, Kenneth McGurran, Martin Gallagher, Sean Maguire, Anthony Sheerin, Gavin Rogers,

David Greene, James Shannon, Brendan Boyle, Dermot Fox, David Hoey, Sean Perry, Matthew Hughes, Christy Coughlin, Barry Travers and Jamie McCauley. Michael 'Sticky' Ward was captain while Jim Kane was manager, assisted by the late, great Willie Rodgers.

Jim Kane told the Democrat: “We're looking forward to meeting all the players again.

we will have a great night and a few surprises are planned.”

Ballyshannon beat a team from Swords in the national final and Cornageeha from Sligo in the final, while they defeated Letterkenny in the county final.

Contact Sean Perry (0879105013) or Jim Kane (0862849425) for further details regarding this event.



Michael 'Sticky' Ward on the ball in the semi-final for Ballyshannon in Mosney against Cornageeha from Sligo.