

Between Killing Times by Grainne Tobin

The built-in cupboard hid a heavy book,
thick paper deckled with age,
a woodcut of an execution,

entrails spilling from Blessed Oliver Plunkett
whose neck still had the noose around it
like twists of navel cord

in old illustrations of gestation,
cutaway through skin and muscle
to a clutter of umbilical tubing,

the true-life horrors of our dead
taught us in school before the facts of babies,
before Joan Baez sang of imperial cruelties –

men and women burned, beheaded,
hanged-drawn-and-quartered,
rotting body parts on show for the public good.

Did anyone lead their child the long way round,
dodging the corpse display, the gaping crowds,
to buy their dinner from a different market?

Driving home from caravan holidays over the border,
our daddy bought us chips after viewing the relics,
Plunkett's pickled head and thumb in the churchy shadows.