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Commodore Barry

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COMMODORE BARRY

When Owen Roe
O'Sullivan sang Ho
For the hearts of oak
Of broken Thomond, though
Weevils and buggery should
Have wormed the wooden walls
More than De Grasse's cannon,
The sweetest of the masters
Of Gaelic verse in his time
Served (lame rhymester in English),
And laurelled, Rodney's gun.

Available as ever
Implausibly, the Stuart
Claimed from the Roman stews
His sovereignty *de jure*;
But Paddy, in the packed
Orlop, the *de facto*
Sovereignty of ordure,
King George's, had to hedge
His bet upon a press
Of white legitimist sail
Off Kinsale, some morning.

A flurry of whitecaps off
The capes of the Delaware!
Barry, the Irish stud,
Has fathered the entire
American navy! Tories
Ashore pore over the stud-book
Looking in vain for the mare,
Sovran, whom Jolly Roger
Of Wexford or Kildare
Claims in unnatural congress
He has made big with frigates.

Loyalists rate John
Paul Jones and Barry, pirates;
One Scotch, one Irish, traitor.
In Catherine the Great's
Navy, her British captains
Years later refused to sail with

The Scot-free renegade. Jones
And Barry took the plunge
Right, when the sovereigns spun;
Plenty of Irish pluck
Called wrong, was not so lucky.

"*My* sovereign," said saucy
Jack Barry, meaning Congress;
And yes, it's true, outside
The untried, unstable recess
Of the classroom, every one has one:
A sovereign—general issue,
Like the identity-disc,
The prophylactic, the iron
Rations. Irony fails us;
It butters no parsnips, brails
No sail on a ship of the line.

WINTER LANDSCAPE

Danger, danger of dying
Gives life in its shadow such riches!
Once I saw or I dreamed
A sunless and urbanized fenland
One Sunday, and swans flying
Among electric cables.

There are so many of us,
Men and swans, in places
Congested with new dangers.
It hurts that we are mortal
Less there, for we remember
Mortal is what the race is.

Swans in unimperilled
Flight above bare hawthorn
Ask, as a more austere
Occasion, a taste for the sparse
That likes its landscapes Northern,
Serener, and more hurtful.