

Lepper's

What derelict demesne does not become a playing field
for the short of leg in its grasses gone to seed,
where the nose is close to their bearded tassels
that bend like the ancient prototypes of wheat,
where blades of spear grass that can slice open a finger
get pressed together and played like a green kazoo
in the high field that edges the Lepper Estate, where
there is always that badger descending the hill to its hole
and boys leaping out of the branches in the trees,
leppers — so they pronounce themselves to be,
same as the Estate, lepping onto a stand of bamboo
saplings that bend and spill them onto beds of dead
leaves. Sometimes there are girls, ballet-footing
a branch till they scream, wilder for doing what
they haven't done before, up where they can look
down upon the disused and abused house and solarium,
hothouse as long as a row of houses, its windows broken,
its insides running wild with things lankier than the legs
on those girls — shotten cabbage, towers of Brussel sprouts
as tall as any of those who look at them, boy or girl, but
the girls always bigger, always older, even if they are
the same age, who flee the boys — after they've
exhausted the resilience of the bamboos — they are
as gone as the Lepper's, but not to London, or anywhere
metropolitan, like the Lepper's, unable to keep up their
Irish country home, who are 'waiting and praying,

hoping and praying', like in the song, for a dream developer-buyer, while rabbits breed into the thousands and come toppling out of the field and Lepper shrubberies, bug eyed, binocularized with myxomatosis, like an invasive species from outer space, staggering and rolling over like Mr. Lundy off the train from pubs in nearby Bangor. Who is there to stop the Lepper Estate turning into a playground? The Gillespie's are supposed to, but are paid only with a place to live, a grey, flat-sided, two-storey building with small high upstairs windows that peek down at the road, the glorious "Gillillio's", who do nothing for no money — father, older brothers, mother away at paying jobs elsewhere, their eleven-year-old, left to act as an after school games-keeper, but instead is action-coach for the bamboo leppers with their jungly Tarzan calls and scabs on the knees as well-skinned as the bleeding lumps and fur-ravaged hides on the rabbits. A Lepper lady might arrive at any time in a Humber car, scowl out of her mascaraed eyes and bristle in her short, tight tweed jacket and skirt of tweed the same, demanding of the boy where the Gillespie father and everybody Gillespie might be, while he, the wee-est of the "Gillillio's" and his gang of would-be orangutangs stare at her shoes with the square heels, which are all the better to stamp her feet in anger with — for she is living in arrears, but well put-together and beautiful as was her Lepper Estate, once.

George McWhirter

LEPPER of Elsinore, Carnalea, Crawfordsburn, Co. Down; formerly of Trinfield House, Belfast (U.O., 1888). Coat of Arms: Gules, on a saltire ermine, between in chief a spur erect and leathered or, in fesse two leopards' faces of the last, and in base a crane argent, an annulet of the first.