

# Mahon, Girls on the Bridge

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 [english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/girls.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/girls.html)

## Girls on the Bridge

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Derek Mahon

--*Pykene na Brukken*, Munch, 1900

Audible trout,  
Notional midges. Beds,  
Lamplight and crisp linen wait  
In the house there for the sedate  
Limbs and averted heads  
Of the girls out

Late on the bridge.  
The dusty road that slopes  
Past is perhaps the high road south,  
A symbol of world-wondering youth,  
Of adolescent hopes  
And privileges;

But stops to find  
The girls content to gaze  
At the unplumbed, reflective lake,  
Their plangent conversational quack  
Expressive of calm days  
And peace of mind.

Grave daughters  
Of time, you lightly toss  
Your hair as the long shadows grow  
And night begins to fall. Although  
Your laughter calls across  
The dark waters,

A ghastly sun  
Watches in pale dismay.  
Oh, you may laugh, being as you are

Fair sisters of the evening star,  
But wait-if not today  
A day will dawn

When the bad dreams  
You scarcely know will scatter  
The punctual increment of your lives.  
The road resumes, and where it curves,  
A mile from where you chatter,  
Somebody screams.

The girls are dead,  
The house and pond have gone.  
Steel bridge and concrete highway gleam  
And sing in the arctic dark; the scream  
We started at is grown  
The serenade

Of an insane  
And monstrous age. We live  
These days as on a different planet,  
One without trout or midges on it,  
Under the arc-lights of  
A mineral heaven;

And we have come,  
Despite ourselves, to no  
True notion of our proper work,  
But wander in the dazzling dark  
Amid the drifting snow  
Dreaming of some

Lost evening when  
Our grandmothers, if grand  
Mothers we had, stood at the edge  
Of womanhood on a country bridge  
And gazed at a still pond  
And knew no pain.

Edvard Munch, Girls on the Jetty (c. 1899)

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Oil on canvas, approximately 53.5 inches x 49.5 inches. Nasjonalgalleriat, Oslo.

