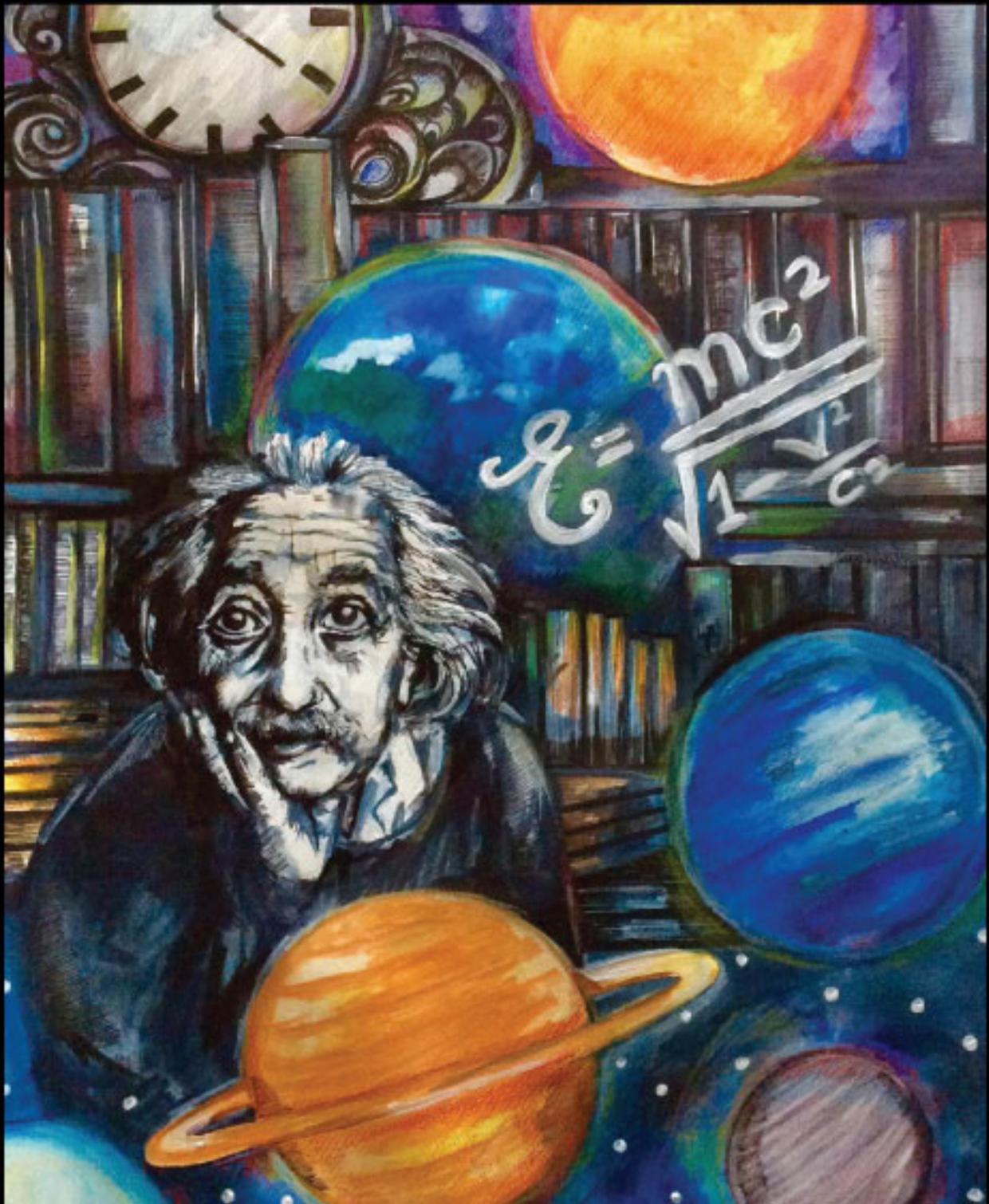


Bray Arts Journal

Issue 1

Volume 22

November 2016



Free

Editor's Note

Bray Arts is delighted to present the third volume of the newly formatted Bray Arts Journal.

This volume has been prepared to coincide with the annual Bray Yarn Festival of 2016. The number of submissions for this particular

volume far exceeded the amount of space that we had available and we would like to thank all of the writers, poets and visual artists who did submit work for inclusion.

We can only promise that any work submitted, not included this time, will certainly be considered for future volumes of the journal.

So, what have we included in this volume to tempt you, the reader. Our fiction pieces include a love story, a cautionary tale about trying to be charitable, a short biography of an escapologist, the retelling of a famous fairy story and a tale of a mobster named Micko.

Factual pieces include accounts of the pure mile concept, a biography and an outline of an exciting local writing project for children.

We have some brilliant examples of the poetry writers' craft including,

we are delighted to say, some new work from the shed poets group who are all old friends of Bray Arts.

Our poetry selection ranges from topics such as bog bodies and Vikings to media fatigue and family tragedy.

We are also delighted to feature the illustration talents of many of our local visual artists.

I hope that you enjoy this selection.

Michael G. O'Reilly.
Editor

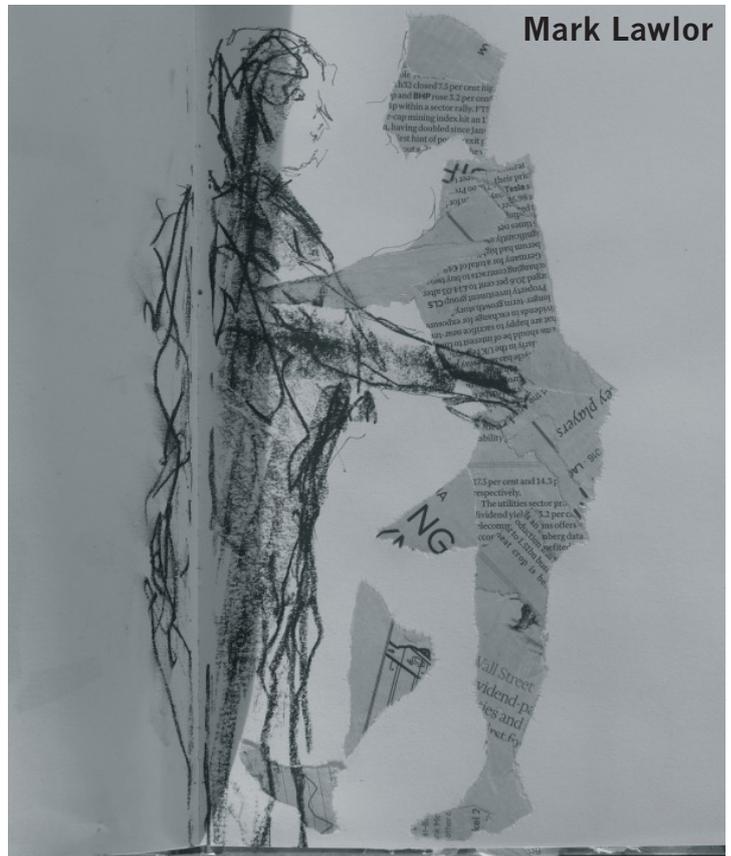
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GORILLAS

by Brian Quigley

I WAS SCARED OF THE GORILLAS
WHEN I WAS SMALL.
NOT THE BENIGN AND BORED GUYS IN THE ZOO
THEY TRIGGERED PITY MORE THAN FEAR
BUT THE ONES THAT CLIMBED ON
OUR CAR IN THE CARWASH,
THUNDERED ALONG THE ROOF AND SIDES
FROM BONNET TO BOOT AND BACK AGAIN.
NOW MY OWN CHILDREN FEEL THE SAME FEAR
AND
I'M THE ONE DOING THE REASSURING
THAT THEY'RE JUST BORED AND BENIGN BRUSHES
AND THAT THE REAL GUYS TO FEAR ARE IN THE
ZOO.



Mark Lawlor

Killruderdy

by
Helen Harrison

Beneath the elders
Where bumble bees
Lose themselves
In flowering thyme;

I lie down in dew-soaked ease.

And dog-rose is the scent
That makes my spirits rise
In the kingdom of the low –
Flying bird.

I take comfort on the mossy soil;

Last years leaves sweet;
Damp In the wing-tipped breeze,
To ease my mind and soothe
My brow;

In dappled light my speckled thoughts take flight...

And the worm-seeking thrushes
Make a rustling sound
Where life goes on
Underground –

Beneath the earthy mound.

Inspired by a visit:
to Killruderdy House and Gardens,
Bray.
(Published by Lapwing in 2015)

When in Doubt

by Carmen Cullen

For some reason Connie wasn't surprised when she missed her period. There was shock but it had a muted feel, like something that was taking place deep down, part of her she couldn't connect with straight away. She had nobody at home to talk to. Her mother had died when she was small and her sister was younger than her, still in school and caught up with her own friends. Connie's first instinct was to ignore it. A period might not happen for lots of reasons. It had been delayed before, or she'd had a light period, hardly there at all. When she was eleven and she'd had her first period it had been months before it had appeared again. The same pattern could be recurring.

As a student in University College Dublin Connie's allegiances lay with the more radical left wing contingent. Her boyfriend Simon was one of them. Recently they had staged a take-over of the Main Hall at the university. There had been passionate meaty speeches about being at the dawn of a new era in thought and politics. Irish students were showing solidarity with their French revolutionary counterparts, the orators declared and would strike a blow against the old order and bring it down. Connie was an idealist too. She believed in equality and the redistribution

of wealth and wanted to add her voice to those who wished to champion the downtrodden. Even so, although impromptu political meetings to discuss the best way to achieve change sprang up everywhere, she never spoke. She listened and drank it all in and by the time she started going out with Simon she became recognised as someone whose silent support could be relied on. She would be there for instance to swell numbers for some sit-in or march. She'd also remain afterwards to avidly discuss points of view aired, impressing all.

'Is it something urgent?'

One of the reasons Connie had gone out with Simon in the first place was because he belonged to this thought-provoking group of students; part of the intellectual elite she so firmly believed in. He was slight, with long hair and a sensitive face. He had arranged to bring her for lunch to a Chinese restaurant to celebrate his twenty third birthday when she told him she'd missed her period. She spoke about it casually, as if no great importance should be attached to it because it probably meant nothing but Simon became relentless in his questions. After that she didn't bring it up again

until she missed her period a second time.

'I'm not going to be upset by this. Life goes on, Spring is everywhere. Nature is my friend and my existence is still my own, Connie thought. She was in Stephen's Green and she'd arranged to meet Simon in a few minutes time. 'I need to talk to you at lunch,' she'd said to him briefly when they met before one of his lectures.

She stood by a water fountain. Splashing water providing a soothing accompaniment to her thoughts. Children ran in and out through a gap in the bushes and everything sparkled. That undertow of feeling she'd experienced when she'd missed her first period had to be held back so that she could keep her head. If she wasn't pregnant she could return to her old free ways, otherwise she'd have to take charge of this new existence come what may. Connie wasn't brave enough to think she could do it on her own; she realised and was seized by a helplessness that made her grip her bag and stand up straight.

Simon arrived on time. About to send him away because watching his approach she'd had a sudden misgiving about their brief courtship, she couldn't. She had to get married. If he let him go now without telling him she was doomed. Connie spotted a bunch of cultivated cowslips in a flower bed close by and had a visitation of the countryside where

she grew up; how the wild variety dotted a hill field that seemed to touch the sky and how precious they really were and alluring their scent. This moment should be treasured too, she held onto the thought to stay calm. 'Why did you ask me to come.

Is it something urgent?' Simon said. He looked annoyed and glanced about as if they were being watched.

'I've missed a second period,' Connie said and smiled winningly

'What does that mean? I suppose you're telling me you must be pregnant. Is there any doubt?' His expression became grave. She thought she saw panic.

'I don't think so.'

'It looks as if we'll have to get married. Is that what you mean?'

'Only if you're asking me,' she said.

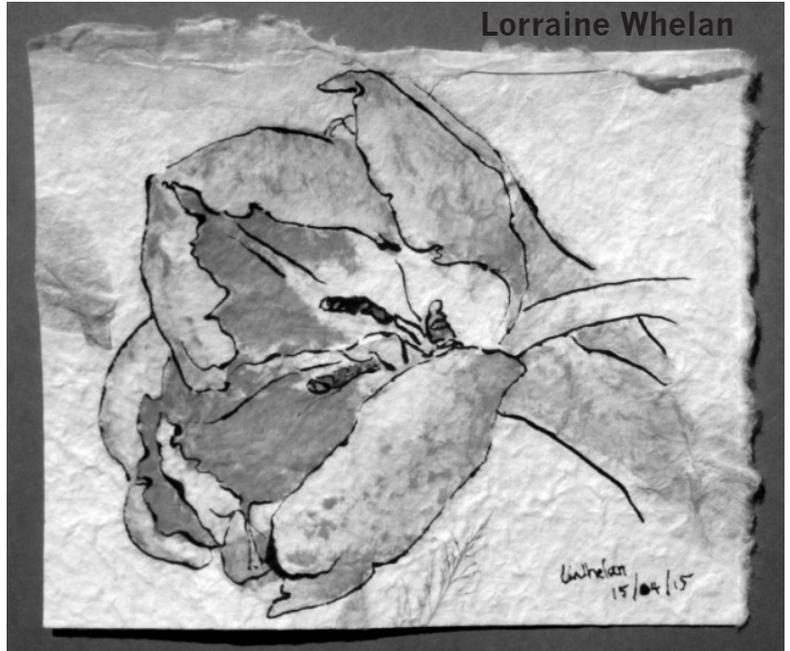
'Well I am. That's what I just said isn't it?' Simon replied. He raised his hands in the air as if he'd placed a bet and lost and wasn't sure what to do. Maybe she mightn't be pregnant at all and everything would be all right, she'd tell him right now, but a sense of detachment took over. That strong feeling inside was bubbling to the surface.

'The pressure is not that immediate is it?' Simon said. 'You haven't even met my parents.'

'Arrange it for the weekend if you like,' Connie said and looked wan. He'll change his mind tomorrow, or pretend they didn't agree to it, she thought in despair.

Miss Wallace

by Jerry Rosenfarb
(Pencraft Writing Workshop)
A True Story



Her eyes lit up as I tested the new cooker. She positively beamed when I said: "Here is where you put in the battery if the ignition doesn't spark." A little sigh of relief as she leaned over the table to see where and what I was referring to, and then, catching herself in her happiness, she ushered me out. Job done, I dusted my hands as the evening light faded, thanked her for the business and reversed down the narrow part of the lane that was built to service the mews of the big houses on the Meath Road.

Next day, when she came into the shop to request that I return to remove the oven tray I was slightly piqued. Trying to take the sting out of the situation and shorten the call I offered to take her and her shopping trolley home. She refused: "I'll be there before you." I finished what I was doing expecting to pass her on the street but true to her word the little old woman, who looked like a ball of clothes on two sticks mounted in boots,

was home. I removed the tray, and asked her why she wanted me to come to do that. Her reply, which seemed to start with an unrelated story, surprised me.

"In 1937," she said "a year after I moved in here, a brick fell down that chimney." She nodded to the hearth. "I got a man to look at it and he told me that if I lit another fire the whole thing was likely to fall, so I haven't lit a fire since. You see, this cooker is the only heat I have, and my feet freeze if I don't go for a ramble, and with that shelf or tray in the way I couldn't get my feet in the oven." "Cold feet are a curse" said I and it must have been the right thing to say because then she told me that the gas lights had been disconnected in 1986. I explained that they didn't convert very well to the new gas and that the person who had cut them off was thinking of her safety. "Yes, and so is the shop at the end of the road thinking of my safety when they won't sell me any candles, but you try

getting around a place like this in the dark."

Her complaints, unusual as they were, seemed justified in the darkening room with only the cooker for heat and now, light. She lit a stub of a candle and dug a torch out of one of her pockets. "Never wanted the electricity in, too dangerous!" and with that quip I queried her: "Why wouldn't you take the lift from me yesterday, I was only trying to shorten your walk?"

"I'll be there before you"

"Well, to tell the truth" says she "I have never been in a motor. I don't travel far and anywhere I want to go I can walk. I have been on the train, from Dublin, and a long time ago I was in Belfast." One could sense the pride with which the

next few words came. "I'm too old to change my ways now, that's why I refused. You weren't waiting were you?" Again I took my leave of her, wondering would she soon appear at the shop.

The next I heard of Miss Wallace was that she was found suffering from hypothermia by a neighbour who had missed her. Her bedroom window had been smashed by intruders who thought the mews was derelict and she had found them in her bed. They ran. She was found lying half across and half out the bed. I believe her trip to Loughlinstown hospital was her first in a motor. I heard that she recovered but the easy life of soft food, heat and the hum of machinery and people around her was an environment that she was uncomfortable with. She'd much rather the cliff walk or Raheen park and the lanes of Bray to warm her feet. At the age of 102 she chose to leave it all behind.

Bog Bodies

by Carol Jordan

Distanced from bones
in funereal displays
shravelled of flesh
and fellow feeling
by the vulture of ages,
you now sanitized
in the bleaching museum glare.

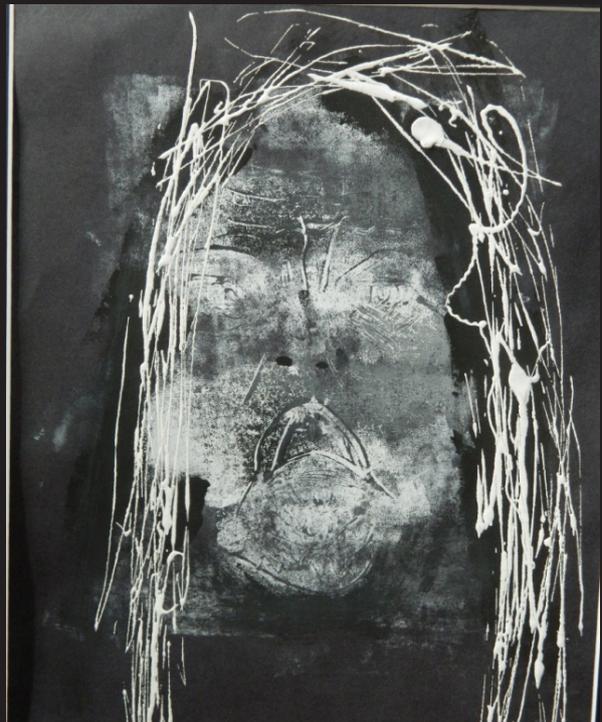
The shock of recognition-
your manicured nails
your tressing hair,
wasted sinews
in tortured poses,
flesh sloughed off the bone
like some ill-fitting garment.

Skin bog seamed
pleated and ruched
by macabre fingers
intent on the smocking
of a sacrificial crowd.
Kingship denied
your nipples cut,
drowned,
decapitated,
disemboweled
ritual patterns of atonement.
You the victims preserved
In horrific remembrance,
skin toughened to hide
tanned by the bog waters
that awful red
the rawness of umber
or ochre red
as those ancient hands,
ancient bulls.
You the bullock
hacked down in your prime
the once castrating blade
has severed your head
in a ritual
or maybe butchering stroke.

Where is the boundary
between corpse and carcass?
Now on display
the panes insert themselves
between the living
and the dead,
the predator and
the prey.

With only a scant whitney
for protection,
without decent shroud
of blanketing bog;
exhumed,
exposed
to the naked gaze
in the inner sanctum

where we process
reading the sacred text
paying homage
to your skin-sculpture –
art or artifact
or holy relic
of unholy excavation?
Violence preserved
and
perpetuated.



Growing up in Bray was an adventure. The annual influx of summer visitors meant the sea-front was rife with street entertainers. We could choose to stare at a Fat Lady, a Bearded Lady, a Tattooed Lady or even a real-life Mermaid. That is, if we had sixpence, which, of course, we never had.

We had sword swallows, Walls of Death and one fellow called Syncopating Sandy. He played the piano in a small marquee non-stop for seven days and nights as he tried to beat the world record. A blackboard outside was updated regularly with dramatic messages. '50Hours gone. Hands bandaged. Legs swollen. Can Sandy do it?' It was gripping stuff. We could hear him playing every time we passed his tent. How could he could go to the toilet and keep playing? We never found out.

But, out of all of these, and maybe it was because of his name, my favourite was The Great Bamboozelum.

The Great Baboozelum was an escapologist. A magnificent looking man, he would stand, barefoot, legs like tree trunks, stripped to the waist, his torso lightly oiled, and clad only in a pair of tight black leggings.

One Saturday morning he made his pitch on a patch of waste ground near Barry's Field, next to an ESB sub-station. There was already attracted a large circle of people by the time I got there. "Roll up, roll up. See the Great Bamboozeleum," I could hear him roaring long

before I could see him. I wormed my way to the front through the forest of legs of the onlookers. He towered above me, standing on a large tarpaulin sheet.

A faded wooden placard proudly proclaimed. 'The Great Bamboozelum, Escapologist, As seen by the crowned heads of Europe.' He placed a hat was on the ground to receive donations.

As we watched, he lifted, with supreme effort, a heavy sack off the ground. He raised it into the air and. With a great noisy clatter, tumbled out an array of chains. There were light ones, rusty ones, great thick ones and a load of padlocks. He lifted up a thick heavy chain. It could have restrained a large, angry bull elephant. The crowd thickened. There was the makings of a big collection.

"I challenge any man," he roared, "or any woman, to chain me up so that I can't escape." He peered at his audience. "I challenge anyone," he roared again.

He hoisted the largest chain again. "This chain has been forged in the heart of the British Midlands. This is made of the finest of Sheffield Steel. Where they only produce the best. Will any man volunteer to tie me up with it? I'll give a pound to any man who can tie me up so that I can't escape."

One man raised his hand. "I'll try it," he said.

"Good man. Thank you sir. Give him a big hand folks. What is your name sir? Sean. Do I know you Sean?

No. Good. Have we ever met before, Sean? No. Good."

He laid out the chains and padlocks and then lay down beside them on the tarpaulin. "Do your best," he commanded Sean.

And, to give him his due, Sean did do his best. He grunted as he lifted the heavy chain and wound it around the Great Bamboozelums's ankles. He made him kneel and wound the chain around his neck so that any attempt to straighten up would strangle him. He forced his arms behind his back, manacled them together and linked them to the chain around his neck. There was no way he could ever escape. But to be sure, he wound more chains around his neck, through his arms and padlocked the whole grid together.

From where I was I could see the Great Bamboozelum flex his large muscles to make them as big as possible so that he would have a bit of slack when he relaxed them.

"That's it," said Sean, his chest heaving from the effort.

"Are you finished?" The Great Bamboozelum asked, speaking with difficulty from his crouched position. "Are you happy? Is everyone happy? "Okay then. I need you to do one last thing, Sean. I want you to put me into the sack."

The crowd duly applauded. Sean pulled the sack up over his feet and with the help of two other men managed to work it upwards until it covered the head of the Great Bamboozelum. Sean tried to tie the top of the sack but a muffled voice from inside shouted, "Leave it open. Leave it open for God's sake". They left it open and lowered him gently back onto the tarpaulin. Not one person in that crowd believed he could escape.

A frantic squirming started inside the sack as he made desperate efforts to free himself. He writhed from side to side; half reared up and collapsed again, amid the rattling of chains.

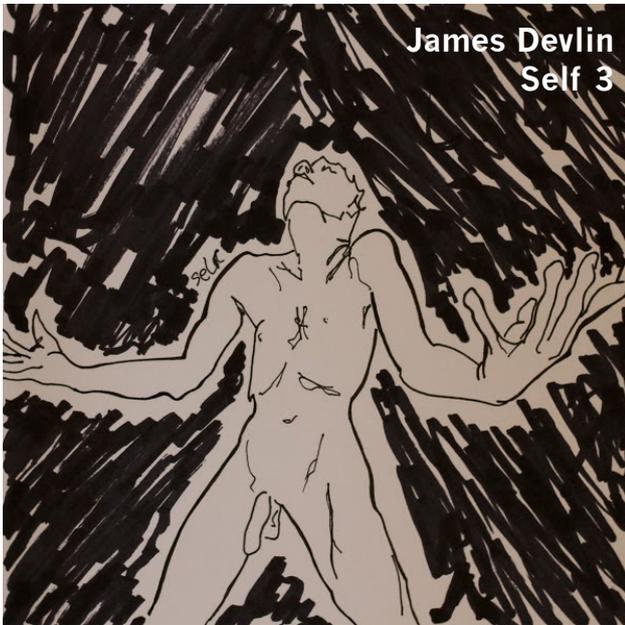
Then it started to rain. Slight at first, it turned into a downpour. Still people hung on, gripped by the tension. Could he get out? The rain became torrential but there was no shelter nearby. People started to run. The entire crowd scattered. The last I saw, as I ran, was the sack tossing and tumbling across the tarpaulin as the grunts from inside became ever more frantic. In the melee, his hat disappeared.

After the rain stopped, I raced back to see what had happened. The piece of waste ground was deserted.

He must have escaped.

The Great Bamboozelum by Michael Jordan

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, give Sean a big hand. He has done a magnificent job."



James Devlin
Self 3

Song Lyrics

by Keith Burke

Hey come on now be real
These old wounds want to heal
It's a big job and they're big shoes to fill
Hey come on now be real

Clever humour and wit beats
Blood, polish and spit
I know that gentleman with whom you sit,
It's just humour and wit

I'm an honest cheater trying to make a deal
It's just me and Saint Peter
And the court of appeal
But it's fine
Hold the line
I'll got up 'cause I'm certainly not
Ready to sign

Hey come on now be real
What's the name of the girl?
Whose innocence you expect me to steal,
Hey come on now be real.



Aaron Forde

Smoke Without Fire

by Phil Lynch

The doctor and the dentist
greet the scientist
they drink a toast to olden days
in their glasses
reflections of their student years
“cheers”!

No cheering crowds hail the worker
as he makes his way
through narrow streets
to meet his learned friends;
they raise another glass,
another past embraced.

The conversation takes them back
to dingy bars and dodgy
all-night party places,
to great debates on questions
scarcely understood;
the more they learned
the more they seemed to lose
but no one kept a balance sheet.

They talk of when they plotted
for the glory days to come
how everything would be different
after the revolution
how it would be for real this time
there would be a call to arms
a conscription of words
an awakening.

The voices of rebels would be heard
over those of primates and presidents
the poets and the protest singers
would write the new anthems
everything would be different.

No one saw the future creep up
becoming part of the past
they meant to change.

Now, in their pursuing way,
it is those glorious days
which raise the cheers
when comrades gather
to commemorate.

Vaselisa's Doll

by Siofra O'Donovan

A Retelling of
the
Baba Yaga Story

My mother died of fright the night the first bomb dropped. Under a starry sky, a storm of dust fell through the broken window. But before her last breath, she handed me a doll with two button eyes and a ripped cheek, a thing she said belonged to my Granma, and her Granma, and to her Granma, all the way back.

My father had only one leg: he set out on his crutches to replace her. On the first day, he came back with a chicken, on the second, with a donkey from the paddocks and on the third, with Mrs. Ravisham the Widow and her three daughters, the youngest of whom could cook Goulash. I, on the other hand, could not cook an egg.

Sirens whined, clouds of dust and mortar made the city grow more and more lean. Mother's gold and pearls were ferreted into the dark streets and taken away by fiendish goblins that make fortunes on peoples misfortunes. Mother's wedding ring was sacrificed for three stale loaves of bread of which I was given the heels. Our brownstone still stood between clouds of dust and rubble. Refugees huddled in the basements hiding from the steely eyes of the Dictator, who had taken over our perishing city. Maggie and the eldest stepsister grabbed me by the

scruff of the neck and said "Go to the forest. There is one who keeps a garden kitchen that would feed ten families. You go to her, and bring us back her pumpkins, and the eggs of her chickens, or we will throw you over to the Dictator.."

"That one? She is Baba Yaga. Everyone knows she devours children. Do not make me go"

"Go then, to the Dictator's Camp." they smirked and threw each other wicked looks.

Father lay on the sofa in a delirium., his phantom leg itching wildly. All he had left of Mama was a secret, crumpled photo of their wedding which he kept in his vest. His new wife grew vicious with the rations: she sold herself to a man in a tank for the price of a chicken and roasted it one dark afternoon, while I was locked in the attic staring at the bomber planes in the inky sky, imagining feasts with my doll: venison, Soufflé, pea mint soup, poppyseed cakes and meringues and trifle.

When they asked me to leave and beg food from the Yaga, my heart froze with the fear. What would become of my father and his phantom leg? What of me, in the clutches of a evil crone?

I left, in the middle of the night. They watched me cackling, as I trailed down the lane after curfew, clambering over rubble and cracked pipes and broken glass.

I walked for many miles until I reached the forest. Clutching my doll, I went in to the darkness of it, not knowing would I ever come out. Wolves howled over the hill, owls hooted and stared at me. Three deer led me to a little hut with a plume of smoke sailing through the dark old trees. I walked up the path, and a breeze tickled the air, and the jars hanging from the eaves clinked and made a song. The door swung open, and Baba Yaga stood there with her hand on her hip, with a pipe in her mouth, her chin as long as it and her nose bent over to meet its point.

"Now" she said. "Get in. We have work to do, Vaselisa."

The jars grew louder and louder and I wondered, what could that be, that song, because I hear my doll sing it too. "Oh, Thank you." I said. "That is good. You are polite. Now, sit on my floor and sort the chaff from the wheat. Do it by sunrise."

up into the air, scooping it with her ladle, which was the oar for her vessel. Up jumped my doll, and swept through the floors, clearing the chaff from the wheat with a smooth, sure hand, and all the time the song of the clinking jars went on. At sunrise, she came sailing back through the skies.

"Now. That is good. You work fast .It is time to spin the cobwebs into curtains. Do this by sunset, so that I may close my windows to the night owls."

Baba Yaga wheezed around her garden, pulling and polishing her pumpkins. Now the song of the clinking jars grew louder and louder as we worked, and my little doll and I spun the thick cobwebs into silken curtains for her little hut.

"That is good." she said. "And only three o'clock. Very good. Now, you must dust the moon and bring its silver light to my berries, for they are weak and hard this year.

Ari Ahmad



She whisked up her skirts and jumped into her cauldron and sailed

It will be the work of the night, and when the moon is pale against the

blue morning sky, you will be done. If not, you will never leave my hut again.”

I did not know how to fly in a cauldron, nor did my doll. We sang together to the jars and as the song grew louder, we rose up and flew over the dark forest and up to the moon, where we swept the whole night, and cleaned all of its crevices, and carried ladles of its silver light back over the forest. As the first glimpse of dawn came and I saw a knight coming over the hill on a white horse and in silver armour.

He put us on his back and we rode back to the hut and offered our ladles of silver moonlight to the Yaga, who grew younger as the light poured over the bushes and gardens. She was so beautiful and radiant and the jars became the most exquisite symphony of music we had ever heard.

“It is good, said the Yaga, walking towards the Knight. The berries in the bushes shone. Every leaf on the forest trees gleamed. “Listen,” she said, “to the sound of your Grandmothers. We are all refugees.”

The knight nodded. The song grew stronger and stronger. 13 birds brought their mosses and their grasses and wove a crown on my head, as the moon became a silver hook in the morning skies. I never went back to the war, but we brought my father to the dell and made him a leg of oak and he worked in the gardens with us, to the sound of the Grandmothers clinking

through the jars.

Far, far behind us lay the city of dust and rubble.

Turn it Off

by Anonymous

Why do I do it?

On a bright new day, turn on Morning Ireland?
Famine in the Horn of Africa
Train crash in India
Devastating floods in the Midlands
Earthquake in China; one hundred dead.
Uneasy, I turn it off.

Why do I do it?

Shaved and showered, turn on Sean O'Rourke?
Man stabbed in Inner City
Hospital trolley crisis
Increase in homelessness
Earthquake in China, five hundred dead.
Anxious, I turn it off.

Why do I do it?

Second cup of coffee, turn on Pat Kenny?
Nurses vote for strike
Home repossessions rise
Mass shooting at school in Florida
Earthquake death toll reaches one thousand
Upset, I turn it off.

Why do I do it?

Over lunch, turn on News at One?
Suicide bomber kills two hundred in Iraq
North Korea launches missile
Isis behead US hostage
Death toll tops five thousand in China earthquake
Helpless, turn it off.

Why do I do it?

Turn on Joe Duffy, George Hook, Drive Time and News at Six?
Get worried. apprehensive, fearful and angry
I turn them off.

But I still have the Nine o'clock News and Prime Time to come.

Why do I do it?

In No Time

by Judy Russell

How fast the roses bloom and fall
how soon the hawthorn berries form
crab apples fatten , damsons soften

summer treads water in the diminished
pools of the river emptying quietly
towards the sea . Ankle deep

a heron stands motionless spangled
by dancing reflections from slivers of mica
glinting like mirrors in the sand .

Time trickles through its glass
unnoticed as the present slides away .



James Devlin

Uprooted

by Rosy Wilson

My brother sketches lines
on a paper napkin
Irish in London
we dig and delve
eager to unearth where
we're from :

On one tree a Levi grows vines
in his native Bohemia
ferments red wine- pogroms
spill blood on dark earth
drive the family away from
their fields

To find refuge , work in Berlin;
a new threat looms
crystallised in Kristellnacht-
on the move again
they land in England , graft on
French identity;

My mother's tree is rooted
in County Clare
stony ground , stunted growth
harsh winds batter
branches scatter , are blown
over the water ;

Young stems of these two
trees grow close
blessed by her wise mother
a happy union
bearing three children before
our father dies

Our mother carries her
babies home
across the Irish sea
convent girls and brother
never knowing origins
secrets buried under yew trees
in grave yards

Auschwitz
Kilmacreehy
Deans Grange.

Elaine Reidy



Clockwork people
Step their time
Freckles
On the promenade in Nice

There was no grand event
No thunder
A sideways glance
The rustle of contact
As our skirts touch
Hidden to the world
You bearing your life
In ordered stacks
Behind your eyes
Questions to be answered
Bold across your face.

Next day, each day
You in your shoes
Bought for comfort
Not for fashion
Stride by, slower each time
To match the pace
Set by my heart and my dog.
No word exchange
A stiff-lipped nod
With a right eyebrow raised
Becomes our language.

Perchance to Meet

by Frank Butler

Six days from now
The season dies
I set my station
My hope you'll dare
Stop by my table
Adorned with owers and fruit
Space with my dog and with Me

Let us speakLet us.....

Questions and Answers

by
Lisa Reynolds

“The best of every world”,
Are we suddenly on different
universes?

Apologies I must have missed that.
“You want your cake and eat it.”
Last time I looked that’s what cake
was for.

Do you let yours go stale?
Why are you so worried anyway?
Something you ain’t telling us?
“So what’s it like as a lifestyle?”

What lifestyle?

“Does that mean you’re attracted to
frying pans?”

Like what? Seriously?

“Does that mean I’m getting lucky
tonight?”

With an attitude like that?
You must be kidding Sunshine.

The Clowns

by
Verell Booth

You never knew where you were with Micko. When he was serious about something you would think he was joking, and he would have us up the walls with fright over nothing at all. He was a dangerous man, though, and it was hard to gauge his mood. If anyone took a step wrong—well, he’d have to watch his back. He’d end up in the emergency ward, or maybe on a slab in the morgue.

He was a sharp dresser, always up to the nines, with his dark trilby hat and long dark overcoat, well in keeping with the times, the early thirties. Even when he was on a job he remained immaculate; the deep pockets of his coat ensured that the guns he carried didn’t

Micko liked people to think well of him, that is, people who weren’t in his circle, who didn’t know him personally. He would give generously to charities, making sure that his name appeared prominently on the list of donors, while he had no difficulty in knocking off a member of a rival gang, being careful to avoid leaving evidence that would identify him as the killer.

He fancied himself as an expert in antiques, and had built up a considerable collection of desirable objects, acquired in the course of a career of criminal activity

His sidekick was the Weasel, a slimy individual who smarmed over Micko, and who was

respected only because of his association with him. No one liked him; Micko tolerated him because he was useful to him.

One morning the word was passed that Micko wanted us to meet him outside a café at lunch-time. When we got there, just three of us—I was a young lad at the time—Micko was seated with the Weasel on a bench outside, with a large suitcase beside him.

“Now, lads, I have something to show you,” he said, “a few items from my collection which might interest you.” He opened the suit case, took out a small metal toy clown and proceeded to wind a key at the back of it. This caused the arms of the figure to beat a little drum.

“Clever, ain’t it? I call him Sneaky Jim, after Jim Doyle, who grassed on me four years ago. Poor fellow, he got shot”. He placed the figure on the ground, and lifted out another one.

“This is called Joey Maloney—remember him? He was wasted too. Was too friendly with the Gardai.”

A third clown was named after another deceased and joined the others, And like them, drummed merrily away.

Micko looked around at his audience, who wore expressions varying from apprehension to amusement.

“What did you think of that little show?” he asked, “Good, wasn’t it?”

He reached into the suitcase again. “But this is the best, I haven’t christened him yet. Any suggestions?” No one

spoke.

“I was thinking ,maybe... Weasel?”

The Weasel, who had appeared to be amused by the performance sat up with a look of shocked horror on his face.

“What! What are you sayin’? “ He laughed nervously, “Yeh’r jokin’, aren’t yeh?”.

“Think about it...”

“I ain’t never done nothin’ agin yeh, Micko, never!”

“That’s not what a little bird told me, Weasel. What were you doing at the Garda station last week, then? Hey?”

“I was hauled in over me drivin’ licence, honest to God, Micko, I swear it! I’d never do anything agin’ yeh”

“That’s what you say, but how come the word is there’s a warrant out for me, a bit of a

coincidence, I’d say.”

“Please, Micko, yeh’ll have to believe me!, I done nothin’”

Micko sighed heavily.

“Go home, Weasel, and say your prayers.”

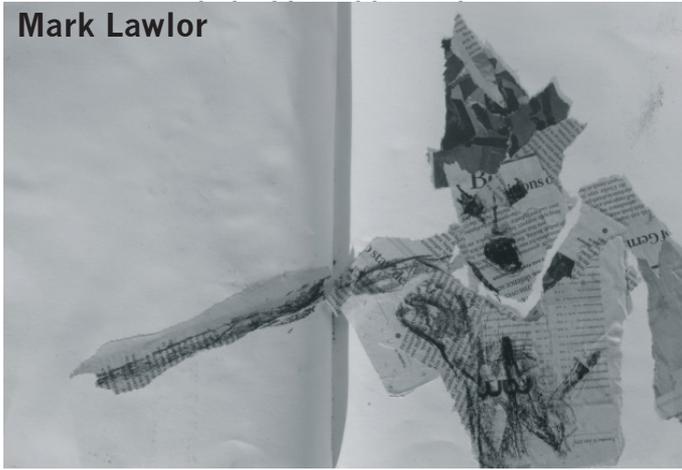
The Weasel, ashen faced, stumbled to his feet, and staggered away down the street and around the corner out of sight.

Micko picked up the toy clowns, and carefully returned them, one by one, to the suit case. He fastened it, and lifting it up said, “That’s it, lads, show’s over.”

We shuffled off on our separate ways, shaken by what had happened. Even though none of us liked the Weasel—still...it was a shocker.

I’m glad nobody found out who really grassed on Micko—I always let on I nicked the money I paid for my new bike.

Mark Lawlor



Pure Mile

by Ellen Britton

Leaving the warmth of the house I venture into the cold, grey, damp garden. I pull my woolly hat down to cover my ears and tramp down the driveway. I need some exercise. I need to walk. Within yards of my front gate, I notice papers impaled on the brambles. Nearer the ground I see empty tetra packs, coffee cups, sweet packets, coca cola cans and fizzy drinks bottles in various stages of grubbiness and decay. Dirty nappies are deliberately, neatly tied in flimsy blue plastic bags, the kind you get in the local supermarket. They have been flung into the ditch at regular intervals along the road. The winter is merciless. No fresh green foliage to cover the hideousness all around me. I am literally walking through a dump.

I stop to exchange greetings with a neighbour. I deplore the state of the road. We both do. It is odd that I didn't notice quite how bad it was before now, but then, I walk the road more often in the summer when the fully

the debris. 'I wouldn't mind cleaning it up, but I don't want to be out of pocket doing it.' I said. I was conscious that bin charges for that lot would be substantial. 'Why don't you get in touch with the pure mile people,' he said. 'They'll give you pickers and plastic bags. When you get the bags you can tell me and I'll help you.'

'Oh, now that you've mentioned it, I have seen pure mile signs on some of the roads,' I said. 'I didn't know what they were for.'

At home, I looked up the pure mile project on the internet. PURE – protecting uplands and rural environments. Perfect! I joined the PURE mile project and received my paper picker and huge green plastic bags in double quick time. Now it was time for work.

It took four days to do the initial clean up, with the assistance of my husband and daughter. My neighbour, the one who had offered to help, was employed elsewhere. It was hard to believe that we collected fourteen large

bags of rubbish, including numerous dirty nappies, on a one mile stretch of road. I've been out every couple of weeks since, picking up litter, some of it dropped through carelessness and some of it deliberately dumped. Months slip quietly by in the peace of the countryside and early summer sees me still walking my pure mile.

The road is narrow and steep but pleasantly shaded. Sun shines through a canopy of leaves rustling in the breeze.

A thin ridge of grass and tiny white flowers grow in the mossy soil in the middle of the road which sweeps steeply down from the top of the hill, its sheltered sides replete with cow parsley, primroses, bluebells and ferns just beginning to unfurl. The air is clean and fresh. Looking over the ditch through the apple trees that line the road I see gently rolling farmland, a sparkling river and Dunganstown church. Looking to the right is Castletimon Hill crowned with dark pines overlooking the

surrounding countryside and Brittas Bay. A small triangle of grass marks the end of my pure mile. This beautiful pastoral setting has a calming effect on the mind but my calm dissipates when on my return journey I begin to pick up the litter. Soon the sweat is standing out on my brow, my hands are grubby and my arms are aching from the weight of the bag I invariably carry when I walk this route. I place the bag between my feet and stop to shake out my arms and to rest, calling down curses on the nappy thrower. Litter is one thing, but my God! This is unforgivable.

Patrick leaves his tractor with the engine turning over to come and talk and to say how much he appreciates what I'm doing. I had never spoken to Patrick until I started this job. 'Look what I picked up today!' I say, showing him the striped bags of dirty nappies among the beer bottles and drink cans I have retrieved from the hedgerow. He is as angry as I am about it, but not angry enough to offer to help.

He shrugs. 'There is no accounting for what some people do,' he said. He was fatalistic about it, but I wasn't. Silently I contemplated the general pig-headedness of Irish society.

'Did you see the pure mile signs I put up?' I said then.

'Yes, I saw them.' 'They're supposed to let people know that the stretch of road is being cleaned by local people in the hope that it might discourage dumping. It might even shame someone into behaving

responsibly.
What do you think?’

‘Well..... I wouldn’t hold my breath..... I’ll be on the lookout anyway, and if I see anything I will report it.’

‘Great,’ I say.
I’m sure that will be a great help. Patrick feels sorry for me, seeing the futility in what I’m doing, but still he is grateful that it is being done and he might even report someone.....that is, if he ever sees someone at it.

I return home, despondent, and sweating, with my heavy bag of rubbish. Surely someone knows who is disposing of nappies along the ditch? What is it with Irish people? Somebody must know who is doing this but is afraid to point the finger of blame. Cowards! I think. Then I think again. I take a good hard look at myself. Would I report someone? In my younger days I would have and I would have trusted the authorities to deal with it. I’m not so sure now. Experience has taught me to be cautious.....as cautious as my neighbours. I too would probably look the other way if I knew who was throwing nappies and other household rubbish in the ditch. My fear is that the law is so strongly weighted in favour of the offender that it is I who would end up on trial and the real criminal would morph into a victim warranting understanding and sympathy. It is far less fraught to keep my head below the parapet, to hint at things, to be vague and hope someone else will point the finger, or live in the hope that

the “baby” won’t always need nappies.

The more I think about it, the more obvious it has become to me that the heavy hand of the law is not the only answer to a growing problem. If more people get involved with community groups like the pure mile project, perhaps as with the drink driving laws or the no smoking laws, it will eventually become socially unacceptable to dump household rubbish in other people’s back yard. Social censure works with regard to drink driving. Why wouldn’t it work with the litter problem? A saying I have often heard repeated is that the law is an ass. That may or may not be the case but it is certainly the case that if the “authorities” have neither the resources nor the impetus to track small cases through the tortuous labyrinthine laws and precedents that supposedly govern our country, nothing will change. We, the people, through our action have the power to make this practice unacceptable.

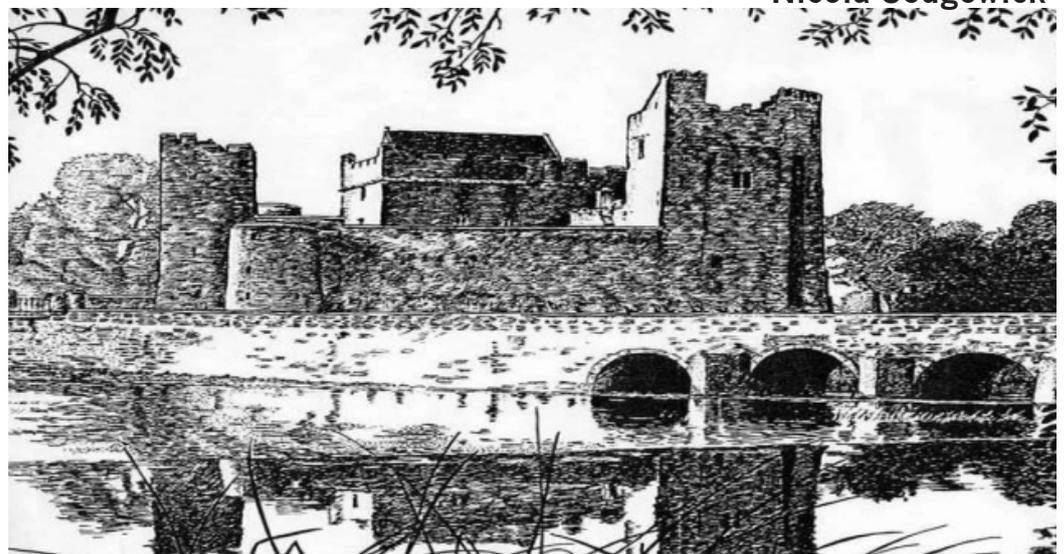
So, armed with my industrial glove and my plastic bag, I will go out every few weeks to clean up other people’s mess until the message hits home. I will take comfort in the knowledge that I’m not alone. Other people are doing the same thing in other areas. The pure mile project is expanding and with it, I hope, social censure. Despite my doubts about the probity of our judicial system and its ability to deal with everyday problems, and my doubts as to whether my work might actually encourage bad behaviour, my litter-picking walks on the pure mile are proving of benefit to me at least. My environment is so much cleaner and my walks have given me a heightened awareness of litter problems balanced against the beauty and richness of our country roads and lanes.

An unlooked for bonus is that I have become a leaner, fitter me. Best of all, constantly walking my mile has resulted in me getting to know my neighbours to talk to rather than just to wave to as we pass each other by in cars.

It all goes to show that the quality of our lives can be enhanced in unexpected ways by the time and effort we put in to improving our natural environment.

‘Look what I picked up today!’

Nicola Sedgewick



The Bray Office

by
Frances Browner

When I was six, my family moved from Sligo to Dublin, first to a rented house on Abbey Road, Monkstown, and then to our own brand new home in Glenageary. All I knew was that my father worked in forestry and grew all these trees around the country. He also built roads through the forests and we spent many a Sunday excursion inspecting Da's roads down in Wicklow.

Very little interest was shown in the spectacular scenery. Powerscourt Waterfall was treated with a shrug; the Upper and Lower lakes at Glendalough merely places for throwing stones and hearing their plop, plop, plop echoing through the hills; beautiful woodland walks around Avondale were regarded as 'bor-ring,' while we waited patiently for the promise of an ice cream cone in Ashford or Wicklow town. I seem to recall small

bridges spanning streams; picnics on a tree trunk; cidona and sandy sandwiches in breezy Brittas Bay. The heady views that now take my breath away while driving over the Sally Gap were lost in our woolly brains. All I can distinctly remember our fights in the tightly packed Volkswagon, a baby on Ma's knee, three of the boys kneeling in the little compartment behind the back seat and Da's hand indiscriminately swiping

at us whenever the row got really bad. And I can still evoke that sinking feeling when people would start counting all seven of us, eventually eight, as we piled out of the car at wherever the chosen destination was that particular Sunday. Every week, at some stage Ma would inquire, 'Are you in the office today, dear, or down the country?' Friskie's ears would prick up, her tail start to wag, her head cocked. 'I'm in Bray today?' Da would regularly reply. But, Friskie knew long before that. She'd have sussed out Da's casual attire. Corduroy jacket, cream slacks, brown loafers, the neck of his shirt unbuttoned, no sign of a tie.

"You
picked your
parents well,"

The dog would have known not to let him out of her sight, accompanying him to the shop across the road for the newspaper, which she brought home in her mouth; tottering after him up the stairs to the bathroom for his shave, sitting at his feet while he devoured a whole dish of porridge and a tower of melting buttered toast. And the minute he opened the front door, Friskie would race out to the car, breath quickening, bouncing onto the front seat.

Da used to tell us how our adored King Charles/cocker spaniel would sit there, breathless, staring into his face the whole way to Bray, or even as far as Rathnew or Rathdrum, wherever his work took

him that day. He'd feel his face redden, he'd say, even though there was no one there to witness the dog's adulation. "Isn't it just as well somebody loves me," he'd sigh, as he snapped open the newspaper before his dinner that evening, ducking a swipe of the dishcloth from Ma, while we all groaned . . . 'A-gain.'

What I've learnt since is that Con Browner had taken a job as a Divisional Engineer with the Forest and Wildlife Services with jurisdiction over the Wicklow/Wexford region. Their headquarters were on Merrion Square, Dublin and the district office in Sidmonton Place, Bray. His main responsibilities were supervising the construction and repairing of roads throughout the forests and the design and building of houses for the foresters. Each forest had two foresters and the Department provided homes for the married men. That operation has long since ceased and the houses sold to their respective dwellers. My brother, John, was often taken on day trips to the sites and seems to remember the building of bridges too, as many of the roads would span Wicklow's numerous mountain streams.

Da was also involved in lecturing not alone to graduates in UCD, but also to young forestry students in Avondale and later, Shelton Abbey. And although, he would not have had a College teaching qualification,

he was a clever guy, one of his colleagues told me, and bloody good at it.

He was a placid man too, according to co-worker Humphrey, who never heard him say a cross word to anybody and always spoke of my mother with love.

"You picked your parents well," Humphrey said to me recently over lunch in the Strand Hotel beside beautiful Bray Head. He attended the annual dinner dance with my parents in Arklow every year and was there the night heavy rainfall caused the Avoca River to gouge its banks and the railway bridge below Rathdrum to collapse. There was nothing for it only to stay the night, Da entertaining them with a sing-song until all hours. And my poor grandmother distracted at home trying to get us out to school.

My father loved his job, by all accounts, and was very proud of his work in Wicklow. Oh, and by the way, on those days that he donned a suit, shirt and a tie; when he was bound for the office in Dublin city; Friskie would remain in her basket, ignoring him, her sad face refusing to respond to Da's desperate goodbyes and reassuring pats on the head.



A vision on this side of sleep:
I hear the music in the background,
The clink of glasses,
Muffled conversations.
Mum and Dad!
Together and happy.
Leaning into each other,
Swaying.
Both slightly tipsy...
I know the scene.
It is summer.

Waking Dream

by Lorraine Whelan

They are in my
childhood home.
They are younger.
Perhaps it is tonight's humidity,

A soothing breeze through the open
window,
The swish of cars,
Some traffic in the
distance,
Beyond the walls of this estate,
That brings this vision.
My Mum and Dad,
Together again
And happy.

Little Bird

by Rita Ni Giollain

I dreamt I had a
little bird
In my hand I held it tight
It was small and I kept it snug and
warm
For it was too small for flight

I kept it for a little while
I knew it could not stay
So with a crying, breaking heart
I let it go one day

I pushed open the window
It was just a little ajar
I hoped the bird would soon return
And it wouldn't fly too far

But birds when they get a feeling
For the freedom of the sky
They don't just go round the corner
Their wings take them up high

My bird came back just once or twice
And it perched upon the sill
The little bird it trusted me
Not to keep it against its will

But then it upped and went for good
I knew from the way I cried
And I wondered if I would see it again
Before the day I died

Its little wings have taken it far
As far as a bird can fly
How do I know, you may ask me
And I'll tell you the reason why

A baby I once held in my hands
Grew up and decided to fly
And when she skypes me from New
Zealand
I see the little bird
nearby

WINTER GIVES US THE DARK

BY CATHERINE O'DONOGHUE

WINTER GIVES US THE DARK,
OF A WHISKERED SMILE.
WHICH WRAPS YOUR SKIN,
HARD. A STRONG HAND
AT A WINDOW, THROWING
WET SKY STONES.
CLINGING LIKE MOSS
TO YOU AND YOURS.

FOLDING THE DAY
IN ITS THICK GREY COAT,
IT GIVES NEW MEANING
TO PRECIOUS,
SUNLIT HOURS.

IN ITS DEPTHS,
SOME DECORATE WALLS AND TREES
WITH ARTIFICIAL LIGHT.
A NEW KIND OF DAY
TO COUNTER THE LONG NIGHT.

AND YET, IF YOU SUCCUMB,
LIE STILL, UNDER ITS HEAVY
STRETCHING SKY,
SOME SMALL BIT OF PEACE
MAY COME.

THAT OF A SNOWFLAKE
ON ITS SLOW WAY
DOWN,
TO THE SOFTEST LANDING.

A DELICATE FREEZING GIFT,
IN THESE TESTING MONTHS.

Fighting Words

by Alan Gilsean

The acclaimed free creative writing centre for children and young people has opened its doors in the idyllic surroundings of the Glencree Valley. Founded by author Roddy Doyle and Sean Love, Fighting Words is a truly unique and innovative organisation which has encouraged over 70,000 young writers since its inception in 2009.

In an educational system that increasingly reduces young minds to simple learning by rote designed to pass exams, Fighting Words offers a complementary approach, liberating young imaginations by encouraging storytelling in all its many and varied forms. Based at headquarters in Dublin's Behan Square, across from Croke Park, it uses a participative and fun-filled workshop model to harness these young minds in all manner of creative endeavours, ranging from short stories, novels and poetry, right through to graphic novels, film and theatre scripts, as well as song-writing and journalism. It's published books and put on plays, made films and much more.

But Fighting Words is also about something broader and more inclusive. It is about using the practice of writing to encourage our children and teenagers to be resilient, creative and shapers of their own lives.

Fighting Words is run by a tiny full-time professional staff but is primarily peopled by a huge coterie of diverse volunteers who run the program and enable schools and individuals to come through the doors for free. Indeed, the influx of primary and secondary schools from across the country has led to the need to open other centres across the country - Fighting Words, Belfast is now successfully up and running alongside Fighting Words, Mayo.

Now, in the extraordinary setting of the Aurora Cottage - home to the Glencree Society - Fighting Words, Wicklow has arrived. Children from schools - from Wicklow but also from neighbouring counties - travel up the valley to take part in lively workshops. These workshops are facilitated by teams of local volunteers

(many more are needed), under the careful guidance of Co. Wicklow co-ordinator Mark Davidson.

Volunteers can come from any background - retired teachers, pre and post-graduate students, aspiring writers, builders, programmers, artists, the list goes on - and there are no special qualifications needed: just a willing heart, a listening ear and the ability to give a couple of hours every so often. And there is something truly magical about being part of a workshop, in the liberation of young imaginations. You always leave Fighting Words somehow feeling a little lighter and better about the world. As Maeve Binchy put it so clearly:

"I think everyone has a story inside them—and most of us want to be able to tell that story to everyone. But the thing that gets in our way is that we think 'Why me? I couldn't possibly do it. No one would listen to me.' And this is why Fighting Words is such a splendid idea. It takes out that awful anxiety and gives people the courage to write and express themselves".

To date, the project has had huge support from extraordinary writers like Maeve

and many other luminaries, volunteering to help or mentor or cajole. A child might have a Nobel Laureate talking with them about their story but that child won't care about who they might be. For it's not about them, the Big Names, it's about the little ones, the unknown ones, and the future ones, even the don't-care-about-any-of-it ones.

The greatest gift that Fighting Words volunteers give to our students is their attention. They leave Fighting Words knowing that their words matter. That their voices matter.

Fighting Words, Wicklow was formally launched by Roddy Doyle on Wednesday 9th November 2016.

For more information or to volunteer, please contact Mark Davidson at Fighting Aurora. mark@fightingwords.ie www.fightingwords.ie

A CELT WITH VIKING HORIZONS
BY MAUREEN PERKINS

GORMFLAITH , YOUNG GAELIC PRINCESS ,
YOU COME WHEN GLORY BECKONS
TO MARRY OLD OLAF .

WITH NORSE HELP YOUR BROTHER MORDHA
BECOMES KING OF LEINSTER ALTHOUGH
SUBJECT TO HIS LIEGE LORD , BRIAN BORU .

MORDHA ASKS YOU TO SEW
A SILVER BUTTON ON HIS SILKEN TUNIC
YOU FLING IT ON THE FIRE .

YOUR BEAUTY REMARKED IN THE WORDS
OF THE ANNALS, YOU MAKE THREE LEAPS
INTO MARRIAGE WHICH A WOMAN
SHOULD NEVER JUMP-

A LEAP AT DUBLIN
A LEAP AT THE O'NEILL DYNASTY
A LEAP AT CASHEL, STRONGHOLD
OF BRIAN BORU.

A QUEEN MOTHER
YOU OUTLIVE
THREE HUSBANDS

THE BUZZARD
BY CAROL BOLAND

I SPY HER ON MY MORNING WALK
A SHADOW IN THE DRIZZLE
SUMMER BREEZE HOLDING HER
IN OPEN PLAY ABOVE THE TILLAGE FIELD
WINGS STATIONARY
BROWN AGAINST THE GREY
EYES EAGLE LIKE
RADAR RED.

I LEAN MY BREATH ON GUN- METAL BARS
SPLATTERED WITH DUNG
EYES STRAINED
EARS ATTUNE TO SOARING SILENCE

MORNING HUNGER DRAGS ME DOWNHILL
UNDER DRENCHED TREES
UNTIL HALTED IN MY TRACKS
A BANDIT OF CROWS ATTEMPT
TO CUT-UP THE COPIOUS WINGS
TO FELL HER LIKE A GIANT REDWOOD
RELEASE THE DANGLING RABBIT FROM HER CLAWS.



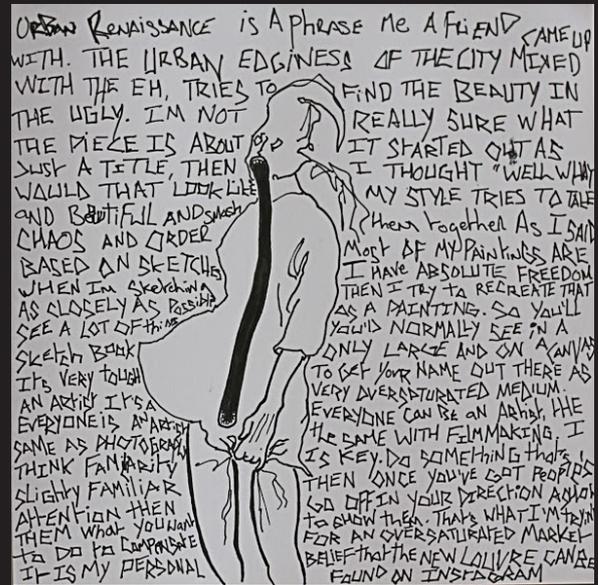
Lorraine Whelan

**STILL BLUES AT THE
LOUGH SHORE**

BY MARGUERITE COLGAN

NO WIND BUT THE LIGHT A LONG LENGTH OF TIME OF WATER OF MEMORIES	OVERHEAD THE CANOPY OF CLOTTED CLOUD CURD OVER CURD SHADES THE SUN TWO DUCKS ARE BLUE-BLACK AND AWAY
WAVES RUFFLE A STRETCH OF MILK-BLUE THE WHITE FERRY SLIPS ACROSS RIGHT TO LEFT OUT TO SEA	SMALL WAVES SIGH ONTO THE SAND SLIP BACK AND COME AGAIN ONE WAVE GURGLES IN I LISTEN FOR MORE
HILLS ON THE FAR SIDE- SHEEP GRAZING PEOPLE DRINKING COFFEE , CARS , A BARKING DOG- ALL DRAPED MID BLUE HUSHED	

James Devlin
5 mile jaw



GRIST TO THE MILL
BY BERNIE KENNY

ASPIRING POETS MUST AVOID CLICHÉS
LIKE THE PLAGUE OR THERE WILL BE HELL TO PAY.
THEY ARE NOT TO BE TOUCHED WITH A BARGEPOLE,
IT'S NOT CRICKET, IS BEYOND THE PALE .

WHAT IF THE LADY IS NOT FOR TURNING
NOT YET PAST HER SELL-BY DATE
WILL NOT LOOK A GIFT-HORSE IN THE MOUTH
SHE CALLS A SPADE A SPACE.

WORDS ARE HAPPY HUNTING GROUND
AND MINDING HER PS AND QS
SHE RIDES ROUGHSHOD OVER PUT-DOWNS
PADDLES HER OWN CANOE .

BECAUSE THE LADY LOVES MILK TRAY,
ALL GUNS BLAZING, SHE WILL RETURN
TO THE FRAY, TURN THE TABLES
TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY.