

Foreign but Not Alien



Sometimes, in the words of Seamus Heaney, *Hope and History rhyme*. But not always and, for many people, especially not now. When there is a bright vision for the future it is easy to wish history away; to regard its difference as alien and those who pay attention to it as if they were an embarrassing uncle or a madwoman in the attic, to be talked about only with a sigh or a sneer.

Now the same people seem prophetic.

Now we see more clearly the internal rhymes of history itself. John D Kelly's *At Standing Rock* links Sitting Bull and the Battle of Little Bighorn with the recent protests against the Dakota pipeline. Both were iconic; both ultimately unsuccessful. We remember the defeats, we grieve the world that is being lost to a flawed vision of the future. Poet Teresa Kane puts it well in her speech on the closing of *Magheralough Primary School*, where she was Principal: *There is always damage to lives when financial and administrative rationalisation becomes more important than the people it is going to affect.*

Remembering and celebrating our past is a common theme among the poets here: Jude Alexzander, Trish Bennett, PHEME Glass and myself all have something to say on the matter. Even the art of Canaletto was designed to trigger memories. This is not nostalgia but a witness that the world which made us who we are is more intricately woven than any one person can imagine. It is woven and kept alive by art and by story.

Not every world can be preserved. Ishi hid for forty years as his people were massacred and slowly went extinct. When taken in by anthropologists at the University of California he said, *I have none, because there are no people to name me.* He is remembered only because someone cared.

We remember and we learn, and we do not entirely give up hope that the future will share some kinship with the best of the past. The past is a foreign country, but as long as there are poets and artists it will never be entirely alien.