

Together or Alone?



The turning of the year is always a time for decisions. Breughel's painting *Hunters in the Snow* (which examined more closely in this article) is part of that tradition, and the upper part of it seems to echo a common theme: the city or the mountain?

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The trend of the last five hundred years has favoured the lonely right-hand choice. Think of the religious tracts illustrating the Broad and Narrow Ways; the broad way leading downwards to the cities of the plain, and the narrow ever upwards into the light. We have seen the emergence too of the idea of the Great Man (and it nearly always is a man) – the Artist as Lonely Hero.

But that is too easy an answer. Mountains are great for inspiration, but it's what you do with the inspiration that matters. Art has to relate to other people. Seamus Heaney's last words of advice were: *be kind to each other*, and that was also the theme of Paula Meehan's speech in *Kindred Spirits*.

It is also evident in **John James'** elegy *Some Other Rainbow* and **Kate O'Shea's** debut anthology *The Human Condition* launched in November (and sold out). **Stephen Murphy's** Foreword and her poem *Threads* are here. The Thing Itself sessions that she started were a great success last year, and look set to continue. Tyrone writer **PHEME GLASS** also launched her first novel *The Blossom or the Bole*, and no doubt there will be more to come this year.

Each year, thanks to a grant from the Arts Council NI, Fermanagh Writers hosted a series of workshops. **Malachi O'Docherty**, who led a workshop on *Memoir*, has contributed *The Moving Finger*, the previously-unpublished script of a story he told at ten9 on the topic of *Change*. *The Healing Story* was inspired by a workshop given by Anne McMaster, who has just launched her own kindness-themed project.

To be kind, it helps to have kindred – family and homeplace – whether by birth or adoption. **Angela McCabe's** *Dad, 1930* and **Bernard Calgie's** *Remembrance* explore these roots, while **Tony Brady** ponders an epitaph and shows how writers, artists and craftspeople can support each other at Collage Collective, and Kathy May's painting and poem remind us that kindred does not have to be confined to those who walk on two legs.

There are reviews too – of the *Star Wars* series and blues/country girl band *Wookalily*.

Corncrake is going quarterly this year, so the next issue will be out in mid-April.

Jenny Brien

Editor