



Kindred Spirits

Drew University's fifth [Transatlantic Connections Conference](#) was held in Bundoran from January 10–13 to celebrate the many ties between the United States and Ireland. The cover image features the Choctaw Nation memorial that commemorates how they, though suffering greatly themselves following the Trail of Tears that drove them from their own land, sent money to buy food during the Great Famine.

In that same dark time, according to family tradition, Paula Meehan's family left Leitrim for Liverpool, only to remain stuck in the Monto district of Dublin for the next century. These are a few notes from her final keynote speech which was, she said; *just an excuse for giving out poetry.*

The speech was titled *The Kindness of Strangers*, and she began by saying how much she relied on that in her early wandering years.

The bad stuff you met, the negativity, the aggression – if you have a path as an artist, all that can be turned into power for the good... That's the only truth I know.

She dedicated the reading to [Alicia Suskin Ostriker](#), who was also present.

[Her book [Stealing the Language](#)] *gave me a kind of an armour to survive the world that I was heading back to here in Ireland... I knew I would get the poems I needed here on this island, in my native city.*

While she had been away, heroin had hit the city. In her latest book, [Geomantic](#), Paula took her inspiration from the commemorative quilts that communities made for their children lost through addiction. Especially hard hit was her own community:

the descendants of O'Casey's tenement dwellers ... they knew story and they knew song. They gave it with such generosity.

There are 81 short poems designed as patches, each with nine lines of nine syllables each.

The Promise

I won't do it. Not today. I won't
do it anyway. Not today. No.

Not because I can't do it. I won't.
Fallow fields lie dreaming under snow.
They won't be ploughed; not this spring they won't.
On the fencepost, a grey hooded crow
is part of some mystery I won't
fathom now. Though I'm really quite low.
I won't do it. Not today. I won't.

It interests me that the imagery in material that's suitable for children is often ferocious and violent and terrifying... If we learn to feel fear in what should be a safe place, maybe then when we're in the 'real' world and encounter fear, our bodies won't close down in the face of it.

The Broken Bough

We held our breath when you were a boy,
Out on a limb of the old oak tree
Helpless below as you shimmied up
Into its shadowy canopy.
That day the bough broke and you hung there
Alone through the sudden thunderstorm
We came upon you after, unafraid
though drenched to the bone. The pattern set;
all those times since, we wasted our breath.

The American poet [Gwendoline Brooks](#) was the first person of colour to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Her book *A Street in Bronzeville* gave Paula:

models and clues as to how I could write about my own community without patronising them, without making excuses, without 'on-behalf-ism' ... How do you negotiate your own demons and your own road with the responsibility of singing to and for your community? ...

This poem was inspired by a line of hers; *the singers and workers that never handled the air.*

The Ghost Song

From a dream of Summer, of absinthe
I woke to Winter. Carol singers
decked the halls of some long-lost homeland.
Late-night shoppers and drowsy workers
headed for the train. The night you died
was two-faced. June light never far from
mind though snow fell. I handled grief like
molten sunshine; learned to breathe your high
lithe, ghost song from thinnest air.

She was asked to write a suite of poems for the [Museum of Tenement Life](#) in Dublin.

I really do believe that Poetry is a sovereign state; it's not History, it's not Sociology, it's a state onto itself. Unless we take those

freedoms ... we may be .. co-opted by various agendas and gangs... If poetry is to be always an exploration, so you don't even know your own agenda till you've written it, it can lead to some strange arguments... I think I alarmed them slightly when I presented the finished piece, which is called Museum.

She discovered that the word originally meant *a place to put things that please the Muses*, so she wrote a sonnet for each of the Nine Muses. The house that is the Tenement Museum was built for Lord and Lady Molesworth. It was one of the earliest and grandest Georgian houses on the North Side. It went from being a family mansion of the ruling class to being a family to a room. The classical Georgian iconography was still there, but its meaning didn't become apparent until she studied poetry.

In the tenement where she grew up the front door was always left open so homeless people could come in, to sleep under the stair or in any nook and cranny they could get into. There were ex-soldiers of the Great War, and the displaced women of Monto, the old red-light district. She remembers being sent out with a cup of tea for them in the morning.

To Polyhymnia, the Muse of Sacred Poetry

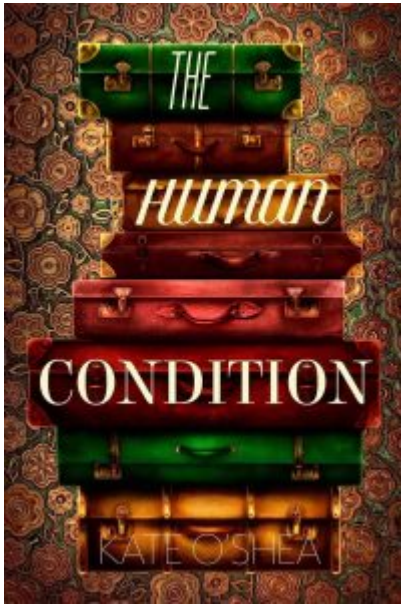
Our Lady of the Apocalypse

Our Lady of the Apocalypse, who never closed your heart
to the dissolute; pray for us, who gave shelter
in broken-down Georgian tenements
Who kept the doors open to the demented ones,
those who came in rags and miasmas of foul odour,
in delirium tremens, the worn-out old spunkers,
the displaced relics of Imperial trauma.
Oh, sweet daughters of Memory, veiled in Enigma,
who brought longed-for oblivion to the meths-drinkers,
the dipsos, the alcos, the put-down no-hopers,
those who came in from Chaos, from cold, from winds,
from rains, to sleep it all off in hallways and stairwells.
Who rent the long night with sobs, who cried out to you
in the throes of their last agony.

Grant them eternal succour.

Jenny Brien

The Human Condition



'They would have thrived on our necessities.'

– Eavan Boland, *The Emigrant Irish*

Whenever I've thought about the honour of writing this over the past while, the line from Boland won't leave me alone. Poetry has that strange habit of hitting me when I'm wandering along minding my own business. Often, such as now, as a line removed from the context of its original poem. For a while, I wasn't sure why I'd been possessed by Boland's words. But the more I thought about it, the more I realised that these are poems that thrive on our necessities. Kate has a wonderful gift to take moments and sculpt poetry from their essential self – a gift I'd likely be wildly jealous of if I didn't feel so privileged to call her one of my closest personal friends.

I hope it isn't too dramatic to say that we might not be here if it wasn't for words. Obviously in the literal sense; this book simply wouldn't be, but we often overlook the catharsis of words, and in our rush to quantify and respond to the world around us it's easy to forget the music that brought us to the dance. Poems carry within them their own hermitage, and as poets we seek refuge from the world in the word, and the word refuses to turn us away.

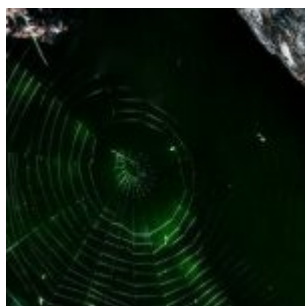
It's all too easy to turn to art in the darkness though. We all do it, often in spite of ourselves, but as artists we have an obligation to the alchemy of hope. We're fated to what Kate calls *the art of being still* and *still being*, to the sublime intimacy of *connecting whispers in the shadows of the soul*. At the heart of art is the heart of one's self, and at the heart of one's self is often a terrifying realisation that we are all inexorably bound to one another by the spectrum of our human condition.

Over the past number of years I've felt deeply honoured to have seen these poems stretch their tentative wings and take flight, and to witness growth and deliverance as they've taken their rightful place in the world. Somebody once told me that whenever I released a poem it felt like I'm birthing a child into being. In that context I feel now like an unqualified midwife

holding a newborn; wholly in the way, unsure how I came to be here, but deeply humbled all the same to have the pleasure of playing a small part in the birth of this book. I'll leave you with the words, and in the hands of a wonderful woman, a beautiful mind and a truly precious soul.

These hands have a remarkable story to tell they have travelled an unknown, unforeseen journey, conquered it, little by little carrying out, these most unlikely, unexpected tasks of motherhood well, and now they write.

With love,
Stephen Murphy
Limerick 2017



Threads

She lies, sad with loss and grief
blankets tucked under chin
Her. Knee. Aches.
Simply can't face it, she decides
permits herself to say no, this once
No. Funeral. Today.
It isn't usual to climb back in,
this once in a life time, she affords
herself the luxury of a by-ball
Another friend given to the earth
they, left numbed with shock
at the swiftness of departure
He lies, sad with loss and grief
beside her when he returns
from the intimate-sincere-farewell
As viewing through a glistening cataract scar
she speaks of a spider's web in the frame
of the cobwebbed window
Back-lit by mellow autumn sunshine,
they reflect, discuss time and effort gone
into this carefully woven work of fine art
He, talks to her of the silk miles,
of energy expended on the weave,

they watch, as a fly trapped in the lost place
awaits its fate in the bracing November air
All but gone unseen by failing eyes
without this back-light of sun to hone their view
They lie as one, sad with loss and grief
nodding to this beauty
an all-too-often unsung hero, that is nature
She later tells of this precious time,
in measured detail, weaving an intricate,
artistic view of her own
Leaving. Nothing. Out. Not a word!
The notion of time scarcity pushing to the fore
of late
For they. Are older. Now.

Kate O'Shea

Image: eberhard grossgasteiger from [Pexels](#)



[The Moving Finger – A Memoir](#)

We don't really know our parents until we look back and do the sums.

My mother was born in 1916.

She was Maureen O'Halloran. Her father was a sailor.

There was a war on. There were a lot of wars on.

In 1935, at 18, she wrote an article for the school magazine about a day trip to Rathlin Island. It's witty and includes little rhymes she composed. I think rhyming *island* with *dry land* was quite clever.

She was twenty in 1936, training to be a nurse, 23 in 1939 when World War 2 began, and she was a young nurse in London when the bombs came. She was, of course, smoking by then. It was the smoking that would kill her. An ad in the Picture Post of 1941 features a young nurse smiling because she enjoys the benefits of tonic wine when she needs a pick-me-up to help her get on with her work.

Values have changed. We no longer commend to nurses that they drink Buckfast in their breaks. Anyway, mum preferred Vermouth.

She didn't talk to me much about the dangers she faced though she mentioned the war a few times. She told me how they distinguished between two different kinds of rocket or Doodlebug. Their engines had different rhythms.

One went: *here we come, here we come, here we come*. Another, more fearsome, went: *we're coming to get you, we're coming to get you, we're coming to get you*.

My mother had a favourite poem or verse about how we have to accept change.

*The moving finger writes and having writ moves on,
nor all your piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
nor all your tears wash out a word of it.*

I grew to love Omar Khayyam in later life, perhaps because it connected me to her. Its attraction is that it expresses tenderness, devotion and cynicism and it celebrates wine. The attitude changes from verse to verse as some people, like my mother, would change.

You failed an exam; *The moving finger writes and having writ moves on...* She could reassure you there was nothing you could have done or she could excoriate you for having missed a moment and all with the same line.

So, born 1916. Young nurse in London in 1941. Married late, everything delayed by the war. One big change around that time was the National Health Service allowing her to get all her teeth taken out and replaced with dentures. My mother and father went together for their extractions in Derry and then downed whiskey together afterwards in Donegal to help them get over it. A lot of their generation, the adults I knew as a child, had no teeth, thought they were better off with dentures.

I was born in 1951. She was 36 years old. And I was one of twins and she had two children before us and two after us. She had all her children, in fact, between 1948 and 1956, between the ages of 32 and 40. That was some decade. As a child you live in a perpetual present. In your 30s time seems to be whooshing past. As a child you do not expect things to change.

When I was seven years old – 1958, the year Pearl Carr and Teddy Johnstone won the Eurovision Song contest with *Sing Little Birdie* – she would challenge me to run as fast as I could to the shops for five Park Drive and tell me when I came panting back that I was the fastest thing on two feet and had a great future as an athlete. But sometimes I came back without the change, or worse, the fags, and my mother had a temper and would make me walk back to Gilroy's shop and search every inch of pavement, though there was little hope of finding what was lost.

Ach, she would say, in a tone that said she expected to be disappointed in me, as in everything, for the moving finger, and all that. It has its way.

But she went back to work, nursing in the City Hospital and there was a bit

more money for pleasures. Wednesday night was their drinking-out night, and she would sometimes come into the boys' bedroom and wake us up by showering packets of Tayto crisps over us.

But her fatalism was also a tendency to depressive thinking, whether because she was missing the war years in London, felt she had taken a wrong turning, was shocked at suddenly being lumbered with all these children, having got into her 30s with her options still open, without the moving finger having written so explicit and binding a future for her.

She was fifty in 1966. There were times then when she was cheerful, playful, affectionate. We had holidays in Donegal in a little cottage that belonged to my father's sister Ena. There was low water pressure. We would save up going to the toilet until we got to the hotel at night for a drink, or go in the field.

She was fine with basic living. The war had taught her that. Toilets hadn't always flushed during the blitz either. At home, she might have moaned about not having the nice secure life she would have wanted, but on holiday she could almost take pleasure in the simplicity of cooking on a turf fired range, washing her smalls in the sink. She would get tiddly rather than drunk. One morning she laughed about having passed out the night before and shocked me by complaining that my father had not put her to bed properly.

A gentleman always opens a lady's bra for her when she passes out on him.

I had a sense that that was a line she had heard in a London play, perhaps a joke from among the nurses. This had happened before to someone, for sure.

She was 53 in 1969. The time of change. I didn't know about menopause. I was only just learning about periods. I had seen the red stain in the toilet bowl and learned not to ask, wondered if we were harbouring someone with an addiction to beetroot. And the bombs were back. And there were soldiers on the streets. And I heard gunfire and explosions for the first time.

My mother had loved British soldiers, had nursed them before. She worked in the Geriatric wards now but would go down and see young men in uniform, young men not in uniform, come into Casualty with bullet wounds, shredded limbs, bloodied. The moving finger had written over them all right, had made a right bloody mess of them.

One night soldiers stopped her round the corner from our house and told her she couldn't walk down the road to the bus stop at the crossroads because there was shooting down there. She ignored them. Maybe she didn't care by then if she got shot or not. What was a smattering of rifle fire to someone who had been bombed from the air?

I saw change in her, but wonder now if the sneering and the disappointment was disillusionment, a sense that nothing changed, that the world would always let you down. I didn't know about depression. But I was beginning to be familiar with the fixity that was clamped on her then by the tranquilisers of that time, and realising that these were what provided the insulation

against the shocks of gunfire, ageing, dispiritedness.

I sat with her watching Coronation Street a couple of days after Bloody Sunday when rioters set fire to the Busy Bee supermarket and we heard a cascade of explosions such as I had never heard before.

That'll be the soup cans bursting, she said. There was expertise here that I could have been drawing on.

She gave the impression that she wouldn't duck if an RPG came through the window. Maybe that was how she had responded to the doodlebugs, *coming to get you, coming to get you*. The moving finger had either written your name on one of them or it hadn't.

Her normal was war, and experience confirmed that it always came back, and that sickened her, that peace was a respite from it that could not be relied on. That hope was folly. That nothing really changed at all.

Malachi O'Doherty

Dad, 1930



Wears St. Patricks Academy

school uniform.

Striped tie, pen in pocket,

wool socks, strong leather boots.

Nordic good looks,

a confident gaze.

Soon his mother
will ask him,
the eldest, to find a job.
They are hungry
and help is needed on the farm.

He must leave behind his beloved
Latin, Literature, and Mathematics.
Take to the road on his bicycle,
sell insurance.

On the mountain
he will see a girl
pumping up her bike,
fix the puncture
and fall in love with her.
Pursue her till she says yes.

He will build a house nearby.
His family will love her.
I will be the last born,
and go to St. Patricks
to be taught by his teacher,
'Rusty' Ryan.

They will meet one day.

'Rusty' will say:

Your daughter is wild, never does homework.

My father with his confident gaze will ask me:

Why?

Angela McCabe



Remembrance

We ran the hazel byways he and I
And chased the morning glory down the lanes
And tumbled through the meadows on the way
To lay our tousled locks in secret glades.

#

And oh the bluebell bowers where we played
Mid slumbering pastures sheltered in the fold
Where nodding shires slowly turned the fields
To scented earth beneath our wayward toes

#

And through the lengthening shadows fleet we sped
Before the harvest moon had shed her light
To four strong walls where hands would gather us in
To draw us near and keep us through the night.

#

And innocence reached up to touch the stars
In strong brown arms that often raised us high
Where smiling faces took us by the hand
And led us down to dreams by candlelight.

Bernard J Calgie was born on the Necarne estate near Irvinestown and spent his formative years there. He has lived in England for sixty years now but still remembers his childhood days in Fermanagh with affection.

Photo of bluebells at Necarne by the author.



The Healing Story

Seventeen writers each take a theme: a middle-aged woman, two kids, is packing her bags in the supermarket. Seventeen stories emerge, each different. Those who know the writers can tell – this is John’s story, this is Bob’s; no one else would have taken the same approach. Yet our stories are not always simply our own, nor are they merely commonplace. The best stories take their life from the twilight zone between the individual and the universal. They bring with them the sense of something both unexpected and inevitable.

How many women, shopping on some long-forgotten errand, contributed unknowingly to those stories? The memories of how many other incidents, seemingly unrelated, added their own twist? And why are some writers addicted to rhetorical questions? No one knows. The point is – writers do consciously, and for fun, what other people do unawares. We all live in a sea of inspirations so vast that we are hardly aware of it. No one, at any time, is aware of, let alone understands, one percent of what goes into the stories they weave. Those strange, familiar patterns seem to emerge of their own accord. For some of us, those patterns, the things we notice about ourselves and the world that we can understand, are comfortable and reassuring. For some, they are threatening – even incomprehensible.

In either case, they are not the whole story. No one story is ever the whole story, for the whole story can never be told. Or, rather, the whole story is in the process of being told, in all that was and is, and is to come. As with all the best stories, we may guess at how it will unfold, but all we can hope for is that we will be both surprised and convinced by twists we had not imagined.

We can only manage the little stories, the stories that are small enough to fit inside our heads, though no story ever told remains there. Stories connect – writer to reader, listener to hearer. Stories have consequences. Perhaps that is why there are some stories we will never tell. We invent other stories to wrap them up, to keep them safe, and only bring them out when we are alone. Before we are old enough to understand, our imagination fashions the mundane into the stuff of dreams or nightmares: the organ-playing wood, the jolly-rogered sea.

But there is only room in one head for so many untold stories, so many

unfulfilled dreams, and those we feed are the ones that grow. There is a name for stories and images that feed such cuckoo dreams – porn. Not only sexual porn: there is also revenge porn, religious porn, house porn, car porn, bike porn, even writer's porn. As the old saying goes, *It increases the desire and takes away the capacity.*

Sooner murder a child in its cradle, said the poet William Blake, *than nurse unacted desire.* Untold stories have their consequences too. They become deeper and stronger, more out of touch and more resistant to change. People seek help from a healer when their stories begin to be threatened by inexplicable reality. They may want someone to take that reality away, so that they can go on doing what they always did, telling themselves the same old, familiar story – or they may realise that will not work; they need a new story to make sense of the world as it now is.

Poets and healers have this in common: both know that a story is not reality, but it can reflect a deeper reality, one beyond immediate appearance. Both can make their way between dreams and visions, following the thread that binds them, not knowing yet what lies at the other end. Both are ruthless – prepared, if need be, to murder their darlings.

There is this difference between the poet and the healer: the poet works outwards – a multitude of different stories may emerge from a single point of inspiration. The final poem is whatever it wants to be, and takes whatever inspirations it needs to make it so. The healer works inwards, towards the hidden, untold story, searching the sea of inspirations for any thread that may lead towards it, gently unwinding the stories that surround it.

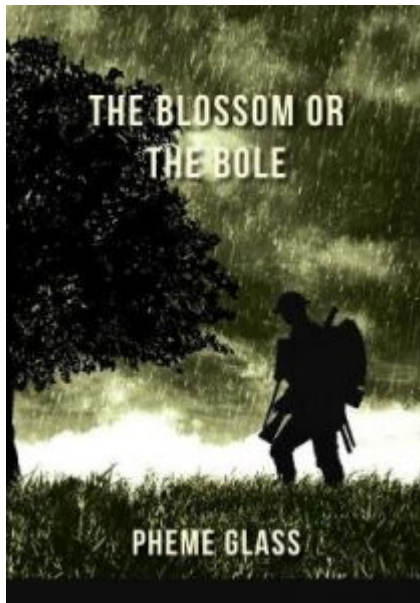
This is an art, not a science. The forms of divination: analytical or Jungian, palmistry or tarot – are as seemingly arbitrary as the forms of composition: sonnet, sestina or villanelle. They serve much the same purpose – to provide the practitioner with a framework and point of departure, and to suggest possibilities that might otherwise be overlooked. There is of course bad healing as well as bad poetry: work stretched and distorted to fit preconceptions about the framework.

Poetry makes nothing happen, says Auden. *It survives, a way of happening, a mouth.* Sometimes finding a way is enough, a way for a mouth to tell a story it could never speak. Patience to wait for the mouth to find its own words. Courage to hold the story to the light – and let it go.

Jenny Brien

Image: TED Talks [Before Public Speaking](#)

The Blossom or the Bole



The original idea for this book came from a short story I wrote as far back as 2008 about two boys growing up in the Sperrin Mountains at the turn of the 20th Century. Later that year I was given the opportunity to visit WW1 Graves in Belgium and France, and it sparked the question, why did so many young men go so readily to a war-torn country and how did their decisions impact on the families they left behind.

The Blossom or the Bole is not about the war in Europe but instead tells the story of the two boys, one Catholic, one Protestant, and what happened to them when they made the momentous decision to join the army in 1914.

My characters were very much led by the events which were unfolding around them, as they come to understand fully the implications of a divided community and are forced to acknowledge and deal with them in the midst of turbulent times.

In order that my reader could keep abreast of the Home Rule debate, the War and other news, I decided to insert newspaper headlines from two of Tyrone's leading publications of the day, *The Tyrone Constitution* and *The Ulster Herald*.

The Blossom or the Bole – Prologue

A full moon cast four shadowy figures into bright relief as they climbed up the side of the mountain carrying a long box between them. The night was still, apart from their short white puffs of breath, which filtered into the cold air.

Halfway up they stopped at a low wall surrounding a cairn and left down their burden. An owl hooted three times. One of the four put his hands to his mouth and hooted three times in reply. They waited, neither moving nor speaking.

A blanket of fog rose from the valley further down, creeping closer to where they stood, swirling around them like a veil. Out of the fog, four more figures appeared. The box was passed across the wall to waiting arms.

No words were spoken. The first four turned and disappeared into the fog. The new bearers moved slowly up the mountain and were soon lost in the shadow of the thick gorse that surrounded them.

The first light of dawn broke on the muddy street of the small thatched house. A dog growled but was silenced by a low whistle from a man as he crossed the street to the front door. He lifted the latch gingerly to avoid its noisy clatter.

Stepping into the kitchen, he stooped to warm himself over the dying embers of the fire. The night had been successful.

The guns had come at last and were now in safe hands.

PHEME GLASS

The *Blossom or the Bole* is available locally through Enniskillen Castle Bookshop; Collage Collective; The Carlisle Bookshop, High Street, Omagh and Sheehys Bookshop, Cooktown. It may also be ordered from Waterstones or other good online bookshops, or from Amazon UK.

PHEME is currently working on a sequel.

Collage Collective

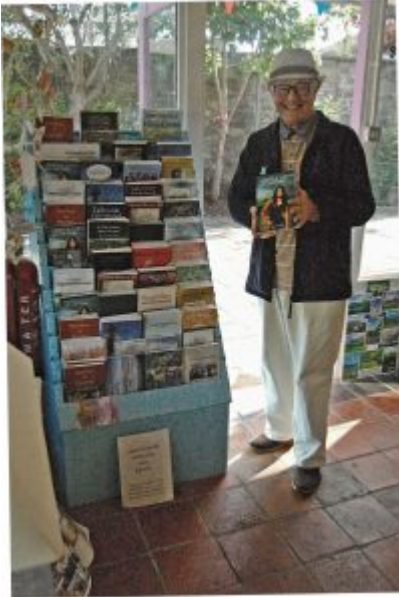
If you wish to see a veritable cornucopia of creative art in all its variety locally, just take a dander to the *Collage Collective* at The Buttermarket in Enniskillen. Actually, don't wish – just will yourself to go and look. On sale there most days of the week is the work of a range of local artists and artisans.

The project began in May 2015 and was situated initially in Nugent's Entry, just off Church Street, in the town centre. The steering group that led to its foundation included Genevieve Murphy, her husband Jon, Jill Stronge, Tailie Maur, Wayne Hardman, his wife Louise, Jill Mullen and others... They worked together under the auspices of *The Hub* based in The Clinton Centre, from where they obtained the seeding money to hire exhibition, office and meeting venue premises.

Within six months an opportunity presented itself for more suitable premises in the Buttermarket, and Collage Collective has grafted smoothly onto a traditional range of studios, ateliers and an adjoining coffee house. Merchandise on sale embraces textiles, photography, jewellery, pottery,

papier-mâché figures, designer clothes and decorative pieces where taste originality and refinement is the appeal to customers.

From the outset of Collage Collective I have participated as an active supporter, participant and purchaser of items suitable for wedding presents and gifts for specific occasions. From time to time I have staffed the payment point and dealt directly with customer's enquiries. Nowadays few people ask directions from a policeman, but many passers-by call in to ask guidance to local touristic points of interest. There is no 'hard sell' business approach; the continuous emphasis is on attractive display and projecting a welcoming, comfortable retail environment.



For a monthly stipend of £50.00 to the Collective I maintain a niche for the display of books by local writers. I call it *Tobias-books*. By calling myself a promoter, rather than a seller, I avoid the attentions of the Inland Revenue. Once a month, I am informed of what titles have been sold and the income is passed to the author. There is no charge to the exhibitor. Shall I reveal a personal secret? I fancy myself as a kind of modest Guggenheim/Saatchi. Scratch me and you will find inscribed skin deep: 'Aspiring Art Patron'.

I appeal to all who read this contribution to Corncrake, please do seriously consider offering some – once a month – dedicated time in Collage Collective as a sales assistant, meet and greeter.

Go On... You can do it...

I do: despite all the pressures that daily crowd in on me. If you (or a young person you know of) are looking to gain retail experience you will find highly satisfactory – though unpaid – employment.

Tony Brady

Some Other Rainbow



The Girl With Rainbow Hair

*I never really knew you
That's the sad truth of it;
Just a smile and a chat
In my morning paper shop
When you were on shift.*

*You would colour your hair
In a range of bright hues;
A rainbow formed a halo
Around your fair head.*

*I would have liked to have
Known you so much better;
But we never met outside
The shop where you worked.*

*

*I still see you now and then
In the sunshine after the rain;
A bridge where dreams are cast
Between far, far away worlds.
Your light diffused in a rainbow
Never to be extinguished.*

A year ago in Enniskillen, Christmas 2016, a young woman died at too young an age, or so it felt to me. I only ever had a passing acquaintance with her; she worked in the shop where I would often buy my newspaper and she was always friendly and pleasant towards me, but it was no more than that. The news of her passing, though, fairly took the wind out of my sails; it affected me more than I expected; the only way I could express myself was to

write this elegy.

One of the things that struck me at Shauna's service was the huge crowd of people who attended; it seemed that she touched the lives of many people in so many different ways. I was far from alone in my grief. People often make the error of believing that funeral services and memorials are for the person who has passed. They are not, they are for those whom the dead have left behind.

I have thought of her often in the year since she died, especially when the sky crowns Lough Erne, outside my front door, with a technicolour coronet of a rainbow. Like many people before me, I have questioned the function of grief; when it is all too late for the person who has passed on. What is the point of grief when the person is lost to you?

2017 also saw the tenth anniversary of my father's death, but his passing sits lighter with me now, even though I think of him oftentimes still. My memories of him are warmer, gentler and much more comfortable and pleasant and are now a source of joy in my life.

I wish the same was true with my grief about Shauna. I would've liked to have helped her if I could – if she had let me; but then, who am I to presume such, when she had so many people around her who she knew much better than I? That is what hurts; the frustration and anger at feeling that this young woman had no just cause to go so prematurely.

In times older, the Devil was known as The Prince of Lies. I often think that Depression is the Devil incarnate. The lies that the illness tells you are incredible and yet when you are unready, you can fall prey to them. Depression tells you that you are weak, when you are strong; it tells you that you have no worth, when you are more valuable than all the gold in the world; it tells you that you are alone, when you are surrounded by family, friends and kind strangers; it tells you that the only way out is to leave permanently, when there are a myriad of better solutions to whatever trials and travails.

Is it then a function of grief, to quicken the blood and stir us into action, either in word or deed? The walls of Jericho came down after seven years of marching round and round, making noise with raised voices, banging drums and the stamping of many feet.

I think the honeyed words of the Prince of Lies could be defeated if we spoke up more, created a clamour that could no longer be ignored. Depression, like other mental illnesses, is not a weakness, it is not something that we should ever be ashamed of, it is an integral part of the human condition. Why do we need to apologise for being human?

When we find ourselves in trouble, when everything feels bleak and hopeless, we can reach out without any fear of scorn or rejection, to find love and understanding.

I have been living with mental illness for over 25 years now, I am lucky to

be surrounded by people who love and support me. I still struggle daily, but knowing that they are there, gives me the belief to carry on fighting. In my grief with Shauna, it has reminded me that though the struggle is hard, it is always worth it, because you never truly know how much you affect other people. St Michael's was thronged with people at her service, she only needed to reach out, but on this occasion, she did not feel able to.

We have to talk with each other more, we have to share with one another more and with those who are shy and reticent, we have to reach out our hands and draw them closer to the hearth.

I still see Shauna, surfing the rainbows; it still hurts and yet I am glad that it does so.

John Llewellyn James