



## [A Brief History of The Thing Itself](#)

In the autumn of 2015 I found myself on a poetic pilgrimage, following the call to Ireland's biggest spoken word & poetry event, Dublin's *Lingofest*. Having attended the previous year as a newcomer to the idea of spoken word, I had come prepared. I wasn't alone.

Many will attend a visual arts or music event content in the role of observer, perhaps some quietly harbouring desires or even regrets about never picking up an instrument or a brush earlier in life, but there is something different about poetic affairs.

It's in the universal nature of poetry, in its accessibility and the quiet gnawing at the back of each unsteady mind. It's in the fact that if you can speak or write, you can form something poetic, be it on the tongue, the page or simply floating through the mind. And so spoken word events tend to be attended mostly by poets; established poets, retired poets, aspiring poets and very often secret poets.

Lingo was no exception; you wouldn't dare stop to tie your shoelace for fear of a distracted poet falling over you, especially with the price of a pint in Dublin. All manner of page poetry, spoken word and hip-hop infused the experience, with poets from every corner of Ireland and many from the far corners of the world. They had journeyed far and wide to produce and consume the spoke and the writ. Mingling at every corner, buying, selling, performing and exchanging – books, pamphlets, business cards and discs.

Of the many topics circulating, the more intrepid bards began to float familiar questions:

*So where is your night?  
And where do you go to perform?  
How would I get a spot up your way?  
What do you mean there isn't one?*

There was a gap in the market, and plenty of poets looking to help fill it. One saw fit to quote *Field of Dreams* and *Wayne's World* at us:

*If you book it, they will come.*

So we booked it, and thankfully you came.

Beginning in February 2017 we launched our first spoken word event in *The*

*Happiness Trap* café Enniskillen. Our mission statement was to give local poets a platform to have their voices heard, whilst providing another pit-stop on the Irish circuit for well-honed performers to come and showcase their work, helping inspire locals looking for something refreshing. Most importantly, perhaps, we could speak to that gnawing poetic feeling in the back of some minds and use our platform to help coax out a few of those aforementioned secret poets.

After a small adjustment period and a successful movement to a long-term venue in Mulhern's Bar, *The Thing Itself* was born.

Over the course of our first year, we have provided a stage for many of the local community and managed to convince a small handful of first-time performers to join us and to return again to build on their skill. We have hosted nine regular events, helped facilitate different stages of the All-Ireland poetry slam, hosted a special lunchtime open-mic on board the [Lovely Leitrim Boatel](#) and proudly held a launch night for the first book of poetry by our team member Kate O'Shea, titled *The Human Condition*.

In our goal to keep the nights refreshing we have brought some of the most renowned spoken word acts, Slam champions and published poets to Enniskillen, hosting talent like John Cummins, Rory Jones, Mel Bradley, Cat Brogan, Stephen Murphy, Ted McCarthy, David Braziel and Abby Oliveira. Each night features a set-list from an original songwriter to help break up the wall of words, with musicians such as Conor Phillips, Paul Corrigan, Luke Belvedere, Luke Burns, Andrew Train and Myles McCormack.

We hope we can continue to provide exciting and fresh spoken word experiences throughout the coming year thanks to the continued support of our performers, our audience and of course our ever-helpful and accommodating home at Mulhern's Bar Enniskillen!

If you wish to perform or attend any of our events we are accessible on all popular social media platforms where you can find event info, including a newly launched [Facebook group](#) that will serve as a community hub for our followers to share and discuss poetry and become more involved with 'The Thing Itself'

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#)

Or you can check the Corncrake [Events](#) listing.

**The Thing #10** will occur on Saturday 28th April from 7.30pm in Mulhern's bar basement. Spoken word by Michael Wilson & David Hynes, music by Katie Armstrong

I'll leave you with some poetic words from our team member Darren Reihill.

So  
I'd like to stress  
that This Thing  
Itself  
is us,

*the many facets  
that bring our senses  
from the selfs  
to ourselves,  
the lone  
beautiful moment  
into silver  
relatable lyrics  
grown  
on the smelting pot  
on uniquely tarnished lives  
on the petals  
that wilt and die  
on the telling  
of the hope  
of life  
that seeds eternal  
the creation,  
that stirs  
in all of us*

*Thank you for your continued support,  
You are **The Thing Itself**  
X*

***Caimin O'Shea***



## **Derelict Delivery**

To say things had been tight, lately, wasn't so much putting it mildly as telling downright lies. There hadn't been an order in weeks; not since the firestorm, when the bullets came, like mini bombs on the wind.

Uther had one of the very few businesses that hadn't been hit. He still had his little general store, and his van, which he could still fuel because almost all the other vehicles had either left or not made it, so there was no competition for petrol. He knew it wasn't exactly logical, but he kind of felt guilty about that.

Despite the stark lack of footfall in the shop, he'd opened it dutifully every day, sticking to his usual hours for the most part and even staying open later on some nights, just in case. All of the perishable items were gone within the first three or four days, mostly consumed by himself and his husband, Mike, with some having to be regrettably dumped – another thing to feel guilty about – but Uther still had most of the rest of his stock, and he knew people out there needed them; it was just that, with all the devastation, no one was exactly in a position to place an order.

Except, on this one day, a request came in over the radio, the signal weak and voice barely audible. Uther had to ask the person to repeat the list of items just to be sure he'd got it right. It wasn't a big order, or anything – in fact, it would have been considered tiny compared to what people would order pre-war – but here in the post-war place, it gave Uther hope. Where there was one customer getting back on their feet, more were sure to follow. At least, that's what he reassured Mike. Uther wasn't sure he looked all that convinced, but he tried not to notice.

So here they were on the broken, potholed road driving to the delivery address with three cans of tomatoes, four boxes of powdered mash, a couple of small bottles of water, six bars of chocolate, and the largest bag of dog food they had – the customer had used those specific words when requesting that item; they were quite insistent about it, and Uther just had to hope that the food was actually being purchased for a canine, the alternative too unpleasant to consider.

Silently, he prayed it wasn't a trap laid by thieves meant to get them out in the middle of nowhere. That was another possible scenario he hadn't shared with Mike. There was no point distressing him, after all.

The van crossed over into the side of town that was mostly unscathed on the outside; where the road got rockier for a quarter mile, then evened out. The buildings on this side of the river were still standing but people had fled out into the country regardless, making the empty streets look like something out of a horror movie. Uther shivered. Mike looked over at him and he forced a smile before turning his eyes back to the road.

*Up here*, he said, mostly to fill the silence, *On the left. It should be...* he trailed off as the house in question came into view. Unlike all the rest, it was a shell, being held up by the buildings on either side. From the burned-out husk, three children appeared along with an extremely skinny-looking Great Dane that was still bigger than the combined size of the kids.

The tallest child approached the van. Uther rolled down his window and got her to confirm they were at the right place. He was pretty sure she was a girl, though it was hard to tell from the rags she wore. He hadn't been able to distinguish the gender of the person over the radio, either. The kid's face was obscured by a thick coat of soot that she'd clearly rubbed at but hadn't tried to remove fully, and there was a kind of darkness to her eyes. Uther had to look away to stop from staring.

*Uh, you placed an order?* he said, trying to move the transaction along. The

kid nodded, holding out a small, tight roll of banknotes that were covered in grime. Uther took it, quickly unrolled and totalled the money – three five-pound notes; one pound less than the value of the items – and curled it up again to shove in his pocket. A fleeting thought occurred to him that maybe the money wouldn't do him much good anymore, anyway, but he dutifully ignored it.

He swallowed, exited the van, and walked around to the back where he tried to make small talk as he unloaded the items, commenting on the cold nights that had been creeping in, but the girl said nothing more. The longer Uther looked at her, the younger she appeared. His heart clenched when she had to drag rather than carry the bag of dog food. He'd have offered a hand, but the Great Dane was keeping a close eye on him, a low warning growl in his throat making it quite clear he wasn't to come any closer or make any sudden moves.

The three kids and the dog stood there, staring, as Uther got back in the van. He shared a look with Mike, and then started up the engine, heading for home – the flat above the shop that was void of life aside from themselves. Uther toyed with the idea of saying to Mike that they should take the kids and the dog back with them – putting it out there in a jokey way that he could deny really meaning if his husband took it badly – but that thought got discarded too. It wasn't a time for jokes, and three and half extra hungry mouths to feed was no laughing matter.

Eyes followed him down the road in the rear-view mirror.

*Ellie Rose McKee has been writing poetry and short stories since primary school. She has been [blogging](#) for ten-plus years, and is currently seeking representation for her debut novel.*

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## [Still Singing](#)



I can still hear her singing, my Grandmother baking bread, her wedding band nestled on the shelf above the table; her hair as white as the floured hands coaxing and kneading the dough. I watched in wonder through the eyes of a child and the first of the sweet warm bread was always mine.

All the old *come-all-ye songs*, majors and minors and lilting airs; The risings and the fallings and the troubles we'd seen, fragments of laments, old passions spent and true loves lost. The ancient magic and mystery of the tempestuous Gaels meandered through my mind, like motes in a sunbeam.

She was the tender and the carer, the moon and stars; the candle in the night and the keeper of our hearts. Her offspring blossomed as she wilted; while unsung and unheralded she nurtured all the flowers in her garden. In the end, she rested her weary head and slept.

The house filled with ghosts, silent and black as the soot in the dead hearth save for a whispered murmur or muted sob. I touched her still hand and kissed her cheek, bathing her in warm tears. What shadowland was this, a place bereft of warmth and recognition; a lonely and loveless void, all succour and song departed.

We laid her to her rest in the cemetery on the hill, beside her long-dead children, in a nameless grave shrouded in grey drizzle. A mute stone cross at her head, her epitaph etched in tears at her feet. We went our separate ways then, our diaspora begun.

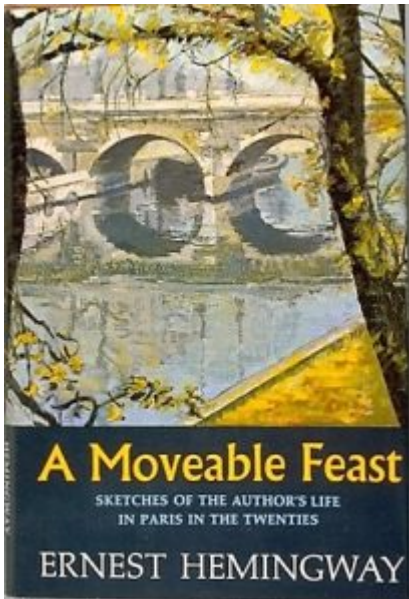
Now, in the evening of my years, I see her in the smiles of my grandchildren and with the aroma of newly baked bread she returns to me...and I can still hear her singing.

*Dedicated to the memory of my Grandmother.  
Still alive in my heart.*

**Bernard J Calgie**

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## A Movable Feast



*A Moveable Feast*, which was completed in 1960, tells of the time Ernest Hemingway lived in Paris with his first wife, Hadley, between 1921 and 1926. His memories of that period are captured in 20 short essays: each stands alone, and there is no overall storyline or theme, beyond that of the city itself, but this slender book conjures an image of Paris that is almost tangible. The smells, tastes, sights and sounds of Paris spring off the pages, and the people breathe again as they laugh and love and quarrel and drink and smoke and work and dream. All human life is here: raffish Bohemian artists, Avante Garde writers and poets, drunks, bartenders, fishermen, street cleaners, booksellers, waiters...

There are glimpses of those who later became well known, alongside others who were already famous. There is Alice B. Toklas; Gertrude Stein looking, says Hemingway, like a peasant woman rather than the Roman emperor she later resembled; James Joyce, who drank sherry, not wine; and kindly Sylvia Beach from *Shakespeare and Company*, who ran a lending library for ex-pats, and provided a refuge when they needed it. Hemingway recounts his friendship with Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, locked into their mutually destructive relationship – and paints a distinctly unsympathetic portrait of Zelda, who in reality was something of a victim. He is far kinder in his portrayal of Ezra Pound.

And you see the young author learning his craft as a writer, trying to form one true sentence that will carry his story forward. Sometimes words pour out of him, at others he struggles to find the language that expresses his thoughts. *All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know.* He spends a lot of time hungry because he and Hadley have very little cash, but he believes lack of food sharpens his perceptions (I have to say I found this rather disturbing). And when he does have money he seems to spend it on food and drink for himself, with never a thought for

Hadley and their baby son.

The book provided source material for Paula McLain, who gave a voice to Hadley in her excellent novel, *The Paris Wife*, (thanks to Marie Tracey for lending it to me) where Hemingway is charming and charismatic, but a bit of a sod. *A Moveable Feast* does nothing to dispel that view. In many ways, it's a magical time – but it ends with the appearance of another woman. Hemingway makes no excuses for what happens – although he seems to put the blame on that other woman, who became his second wife. But he is nostalgic for the past, and for Hadley. *I wish had died before I ever loved anyone but her*, he says. He finishes as he starts, with a tribute to the city.

*There is never any ending to Paris and the memory of each person who has lived in it differs to that of any other. We always returned to it no matter who we were or how it was changed or with what difficulties, or ease, it could be reached. Paris was always worth it and you received a return for whatever you brought to it. But this was how Paris was in the early days when we were very poor and very happy.*

### **Tony Brady**

#### **Paris Café, 1944**

*after an incident in A Moveable Feast*

Storm-drops rattled on the window. He,  
still wearing his wet coat against the cold,  
sat down, and ordered rum St James,  
took out his pencil and began anew  
his search  
to write one sentence  
that he knew was true.

Behind the bar an ancient parrot perched,  
a Grey from Africa, and no one else  
in all the place, except one girl who sat,  
her back to him.  
Her crow-black hair cut her white neck  
(she had no coat). Her dress  
was faded, but her very best.

His loins stirred  
The parrot winked one eye  
It stretched its neck, it squawked  
"Méchant, méchant!"  
She did not turn, ignored the bird.  
He smiled, looked down, and wrote  
"The parrot did not know the word it spoke."

He wrote a story of the parrot and the girl;  
He did not hear the bell  
above the door  
ring twice.



When he  
looked up again, the rain was gone.  
And so was she.

*Jenny Brien*

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## Fear

Once in the dead of night  
I went alone to claim my right  
To live life without fear  
Of the nether world and queer.  
Blindly crossing fields alone  
I finally came upon a stone-  
a sign I was on hallowed ground  
And there I walked around  
Its ancient chapel ruins  
With headstones and its tombs  
Then in the dark and silent air  
I sensed an evil stare  
Without a single saving grace  
I froze in that place  
And yet by day I do not fear  
Instead I find it peaceful here  
Treading bones of buried men  
What be the difference then-  
between dark and light  
Surely not my gift of sight  
Something else is at play  
That makes me cross myself and pray  
Could it be my loss of faith?  
Or the devil in my wait  
Or my imagination playing heavy  
In a world that is already  
Cursed by its inheritance  
That no amount of penitence  
Can erase or wash away  
Must I wait that final day

For that thing I played no part in  
That thing we call original sin  
To live life without fear  
Of the nether world and queer.

**Peter Byrne**

Featured image modified from [The Ruins of Holyrood Chapel](#) by Louis Daguerre

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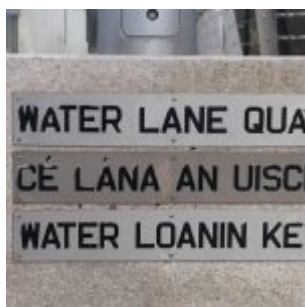
## [Chips to Chops](#)

When we were starting out and skint,  
You skinned spuds,  
While I chopped them into chips.  
And eating them with egg, beans and bacon-bits,  
We passed tea time and ketchup,  
In constant conversation.

When we were finished up and flush,  
I reserved a table,  
While you took an age to dress.  
And eating lamb chops, champ with water-cress,  
We passed meal time and mint sauce,  
In silence.

**Peter Byrne**

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## [Language and Mother Tongue](#)

Recently, Unionist students at Queens have been protesting about bilingual signs. While claiming no disrespect for the Irish language as such, they view them as divisive sectarian symbols under the terms of the Flags and Emblems Act. They suspect that those who push the *bi-lingual agenda* are interested in only three words of Irish – *Votáil Sinn Féin*.

But of course, Irish is not the property of one particular politics or religion. I have known Unionists who were fluent Irish speakers but were unwilling to admit that to their colleagues. It has been the policy of the UK government for some years to support minority languages. Bilingual education has led to something of a renaissance in both Welsh and Scottish Gaelic. Learning Irish can be a very British thing to do.

Bilingualism is not uncommon. In fact, around 50% of the world's population speak two or more languages fluently. This is largely because of the expansion of a few colonial languages – Mandarin, English, French, Russian, Arabic, Spanish. Most of the world's languages have even fewer speakers than Irish has. Their native speakers, in order to thrive in the modern interconnected world, need one of the major languages as well – and it is usually obvious which one. For native speakers of one of the major languages the need for a second language is neither so urgent – nor so clear.

Linguists distinguish the two classes of language as *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is your native language, your mother tongue, that which you speak without needing to be consciously aware of its structure or constraints. *Parole* is the learned language, the one you need to communicate with those who do not understand your mother tongue.

It is only natural that someone whose mother tongue is also a *parole* should be suspicious of anyone who understands it but refuses to use it. That prejudice even extends to overheard conversations – minority speakers are accustomed to having their conversations interrupted with the injunction to 'speak English!' There was even a case recently where a barman was sacked by his boss (also an Irish speaker) for not speaking English to bilingual customers. It doesn't only happen with Irish – the experience is also common for French speakers in Canada or Spanish speakers in Texas. No minority language is safe.

Yet even monoglot English speakers speak two languages. We have to be formally taught to speak 'proper English' – English-as-*parole*, and we, too, have felt the shame of being despised when we use our mother tongue. Polite English, for example, does not have a plural form of the second person but nearly every vernacular version does, and native speakers recognise the difference even if they cannot put it into words. Go deeply enough and all rules are obscure until you try to explain them to an outsider. Lately, I introduced a French girl to the ubiquitous adjective 'wee', and only afterwards did I realise that when someone asks you to 'take a wee seat' they are of course saying nothing about the size of the chair, but something important about how long you can expect to sit there.

*Langue* gives voice to our particular experience and that of our community, or rather the many communities to which our ancestors and our neighbours' ancestors have belonged, right back to the dawn of time. Irish is a deep part of that history. It is there in names and place names, in the words we use unconsciously, and in how we use them. Like all living language, it changes and evolves continually. Your mother tongue is never exactly the same as your mother's tongue.

Parole is important for efficient and urgent communication, but express precisely what is in your heart you need to use your mother tongue and risk misunderstanding. The commonality of formal grammar is not the only possible communion. Language is not a form of mathematics, to be constructed out of a limited set of formal axioms. All languages borrow from each other. As someone once said, English does more than that – it follows other languages down dark alleys and mugs them for their vocabularies.

And writers, of course, steal all the time. We make stuff up. We drop hints, we twist words to mean two or more things at the same time, we say things while seeming to say the opposite. We invent whole languages. Why? Because we understand that not all that can be said can be said plainly. Understanding takes effort and imagination, and a willingness to question your assumptions, but the world is more full of meaning than any one person is able to grasp.

Sometimes, of course, another's understanding is not even the point. My own mother was reared in West Cork, where people spoke both Irish and English to their cows because they did not know which they understood better. She never learned Irish formally but picked up many words. Being a well-brought-up Protestant girl she very rarely swore, but when she did she swore in fluent Munster Gaelic.

**Jenny Brien**

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## [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

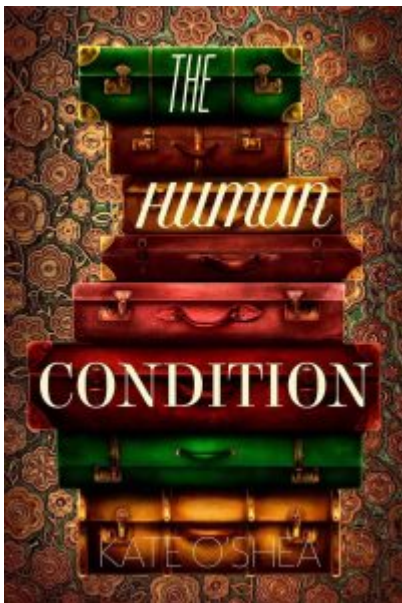
Who kept the doors open to the demented ones,  
those who came in rags and miasmas of foul odour,  
in delirium tremens, the worn-out old spunkers,  
the displaced relics of Imperial trauma.  
Oh, sweet daughters of Memory, veiled in Enigma,  
who brought longed-for oblivion to the meths-drinkers,  
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**

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## [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.

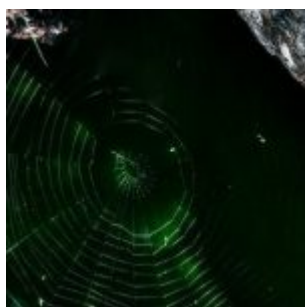
I hope it isn't too dramatic to say that we might not be here if it wasn't for words. Obviously in the literal sense; this book simply wouldn't be, but we often overlook the catharsis of words, and in our rush to quantify and respond to the world around us it's easy to forget the music that brought us 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-bye  
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](#)