



[A Fresh Portrait](#)

Of the many great events on offer at Fermanagh's [Flive](#) festival, one spectacle in particular stood alone in the limelight. *Young Stephen*— an energetic, one-man dramatisation of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Adapted for stage by Prin Ó Duigneáin, Paddy McEneaney stars as Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's own semi-fictional avatar.

The performance provides a fresh interpretation of Joyce's work, focusing on the childhood of Stephen Dedalus. Set mostly during Stephen's first term at boarding school, the play examines the influence of two major factors in Joyce's early development; religion and politics.

Keeping to one setting and limiting the themes helps reel in Joyce's chaotic style. True to the spirit of portrait, McEneaney's performance gives a strong sense of perspective through his narrative voice. A simplistic and immature vocal tone opens the play, showing us a world through the eyes of an infant, then a sharp change to clear and serious dialogue shows us the trials of adolescence. His mastery of voice eases the understanding of this fast paced play, with frequent time skips and multiple characters. These subtle changes in accent and tone aid suspension of disbelief in a way that makes it easy to forget this is a one man show.

It isn't just the acting talent that holds the staggered story together, but a minimal yet effective attitude towards stage props. A simple dressing panel serves to hide a small number of clothing items, the various hats and jackets which help discern between Stephen and the other characters, while a wooden box serves as table, school desk, bed and pulpit. A certain amount of imagination is still required to picture the changing locations, or believe that our bearded protagonist is a teenage boy, but the small touches can make all the difference, especially the iconic glasses that serve an important role in the plot and help us see Joyce brought to life on stage.

There is no better time to revisit Joyce's formative work, with the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising earlier this year, exploring the art of that era gives us an important first-hand account of the period. The political and theological upheaval of the time had a huge impact on Joyce, as evidenced by his bringing up these themes repeatedly in his semi-autobiographical work.

One of the vital parts of transitioning to adulthood is the epiphany that adults have differing beliefs, and are not always right. We see Joyce

beginning to form his own beliefs and opinions, as he challenges the authority of the priests in his Catholic boarding school and sees the disruption caused by secular politics discussed at a family dinner.

Snippets of these themes are present from the opening lines of the play, with dialogue cleverly chosen from the source material to strengthen them. The climactic final scene, so expertly weaved by McEneaney, takes on a life of its own as Stephen's family clash on the stage. Where the protagonist himself disappears behind other characters, in a sense he is embodied by the audience, who get to experience his anxiety instead.

This surreal feeling really adds to its magic of the play, but sadly it is over too soon. Despite McEneaney's talent, no one could be expected to give such an energetic and heartfelt performance for a longer running time.

Young Stephen is an easy performance to view, but slightly less so to digest. Fans of Joyce's work will relish it, but may be left disappointed they can't witness *more* of the powerful rendition. As McEneaney says of performing Joyce's work, 'great writing will always speak for itself,' but in this case great acting has helped it speak volumes.

Caimin O'Shea

Young Stephen was performed at Blakes of the Hollow on October 2nd, and again late October in the Columbian Hall Theatre, Galway, with further dates to be confirmed.

Radio Days

When Fermanagh Writers were first contacted by Owen McFadden, a BBC radio producer working in Belfast, the original brief was for some of our older members to write reflections on their past experiences for a Sunday afternoon programme on BBC Radio Ulster called *The Time of our Lives*.

I was probably one of the first to pitch in. Being twenty years older than the qualifying age, I wrote a piece called *My First Love*, about my childhood in war torn Liverpool.

It was all about food.

I was hungry right up until I was sixteen years of age, when I joined the Royal Navy. That was the first time I could ever remember walking away from a table that still had food on it.

When I was selected to take part the next ordeal was to go into the studio in Enniskillen and record while Owen listened in over at he BBC in Belfast.

I found the experience of talking into a microphone while wearing headphones listening to myself to be quite unnerving. It was a bit like talking inside my own head and the result was quite alarming as the headphones boomed while I was speaking. Anyway the recording person soon fitted me up with a quieter pair of headphones and I only had to read through the piece twice before they were satisfied.

At the end of my piece I finished with the line –

My next true love was cigarettes; but that is another story.

I felt that might give an opportunity for a second recording session but so far they haven't rung me back.

When I listened to the transmission I was quite surprised at how I sounded. On the day of recording I had felt as though I had won the 'monotonous voice of the month' award, but it sounded quite good on the radio, apart from my rather odd accent.

I say 'odd accent' because I was raised as a child in Liverpool, Glasgow and Limavady in more or less equal portion, and so would claim that I was beaten up in the playground in three different dialects. Kids can be very unforgiving.

Owen realised that there was a wealth of talent in the group and started to invite more writers to take part, both as readers and as guests. Wayne and Louise Hardman talked about his career as a sports reporter and their handweaving business [Wove in Hove](#); Catherine Vallely about her encounter with a man who kidnapped himself; Trish Bennett about her mother's obsession with a potato peeler – and there were many more.

So, the whole BBC experience has been good for a number of the writers in the group and Owen McFadden has promised to come down to Fermanagh give us some tips on how to write for the radio, and perhaps collect some more stories.

Another early memory of mine was remembering seeing a bronze 'death penny' on the wall at both of my Grandfathers' houses which commemorated deaths in the First World War. Neither of the families would talk about them.

It took me quite a lot of ferreting with the help of Natasha Martin at Enniskillen Castle Regimental Museum (another one of Fermanagh Writers) for me to eventually root out the facts.

They were two men who had grown up together as kids in Limavady and had met up again when they signed up with the 10th Battalion of the Inniskilling Fusiliers. They were yards from each other when they were killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

When they died they were no relation to each other, but the nephew of one married the other's niece – my Mum and Dad.

My mothers' uncle's body was never found. His name is on the monument at Thiepval. My father's uncle's body was only found in 1934 when the War Graves

Commission were creating the long term cemeteries that we know today. So it was over seventeen years after his death that they informed his mother that he was now accounted for.

Bob Baird is a Rotarian, a Paul Harris Fellow and Director of the Westville Family Resource Centre in Enniskillen

Bob's article about the fate of his great-uncles was published in the July 1 edition of the *Newsletter*.



[Row the Erne](#)

In 2014 the Row the Erne Project began with the building of a 33ft, 10 man, traditional Irish boat called a Curach. This is the kind of boat in which Irish people traded with Britain and Western Europe for more than 3,000 years, bringing back not only goods but also new ideas, technologies and fashions.

There is only one curach of a similar type in Ireland, called the *Colmcille*. This is a sea-going craft (like most large curachs) based on the North Coast and is mainly used for an annual expedition to Iona, so the general public have limited access.

Row the Erne named its curach *The Menapien*, after the Menapi tribe, who first came to Fermanagh in the Bronze Age. The project is unique in Ireland as the curach is used all year round (weather permitting). It rows in the evenings, at weekends (for picnics, day trips and overnights) and on longer expeditions throughout the Erne system, often staying overnight on uninhabited islands that it can easily reach because of its shallow draught. It is an ideal platform for observing wildlife.

Over 60 people volunteered 2,500 hours in all to build the curach. We researched across the island of Ireland to develop skills that would be of use in the future and to share with others. We invited a wide range of groups to help design, build and row the curach. Our youth section designed and built our [website](#).

The curach was launched by walking it up through the streets of Enniskillen led by a procession of the oars, carried by the Emergency services, funders

and supporters. The streets were lined with well-wishers, many seeing it for the first time. It was blessed by Fr Brian Darcy and Rev Ruth Watt and made its maiden voyage with a flotilla that included Waterways Ireland, the RNLi, The Police, Erne Paddlers and Local tour provider, the Kestrel.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/7R0II_PyI0k

Over 700 local people have rowed with us on Lough Erne, many getting out on the water for the first time. Rowing a 10 person, 33ft long, 8ft wide boat is very empowering. People with disabilities, or who are simply 'scared' of the water can instantly enjoy it. Surrounded by fellow crew members of similar levels of inexperience (with a core number of experienced crew), they are supported, yet they are pulling together, enabling the curach come alive on the water.

The Curach has something for everyone. Young children from two-and-a-half years old love to go pirate-hunting and mermaid-watching while retired elderly folk, up to 94 years, have realised they can row and get exercise in a social environment.

Row the Erne led the celebrations in Fermanagh commemorating the St 1,500th anniversary of the death of Saint Columbanus. The Saint, widely regarded as one of the most influential individuals of his era, began his monastic life on Cleenish Island on Upper Lough Erne and not in Bangor, Co. Down, as many believe. *Friends of Columbanus*, a group from Bangor, joined us in a day of celebration that involved re-enacting the life of his day. Participants dressed as monks rowed to Cleenish where they enjoyed the foods of that time cooked on an open fire and storytelling in the ruins of the Abbey.

We have taken part in several events on behalf of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. These included providing rows at food festivals and building an outdoor cinema on the curach that allowed us to row participants to unusual locations in the dark of night to enjoy a movie.

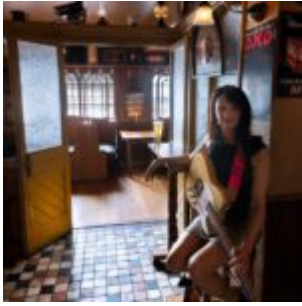
The *Menapian* is docked at the secure jetty of Waterways Ireland Headquarters in Enniskillen, and they have provided funding to run open days and events, opening the building to the local community.

Row the Erne has now inspired and is mentoring another group in Belfast to build a boat of their own. They are calling themselves *Row the Lagan*.

Like the curach, Row the Erne is a living breathing thing. As we continue to develop and push the boundaries of what is happening on the local waterways, so too will attitudes to accessing and enjoying it change and grow. We look forward to that challenge!

Olivia Cosgrove is Chairperson of Row the Erne

Featured Image: Mark Marlow/pacemaker press



[Maeve Dunphy – an interview by Trevor Hodgett](#)

Omagh singer-songwriter Maeve Dunphy's debut album [Scarlet](#), which was released in 2012, was distinguished by her exceptional songwriting, with lyrics which were arresting and often startling and music which ambitiously contained elements of blues, jazz, reggae and country.

Her current CD *Don't Wait Up For Me*, a five track EP, represents a change of direction for on it she collaborates with Artie McGlynn and *The Grooveyard Shift*, on a repertoire which contains only one original, alongside interpretations of four songs by other writers.

We've captured the essence of how we sound live. Some people record very well but in the past I wasn't always one of them but I think I've done it right this time. We didn't do take after take – it was, generally speaking, quite a live recording.

Included are two tracks that Dunphy picked up from listening to Aretha Franklin – *Nobody Like You* and *Muddy Water*, a song of course which has also been covered by the likes of Jimmy Witherspoon, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Lou Rawls.

One wonders though if Dunphy might have felt intimidated interpreting songs which had been recorded by the sainted Aretha, knowing that her versions would have to bear comparison to Aretha's.

You have to put that intimidation aside because there's nobody like Aretha. Her versions are gorgeous and I love listening to them but I thought, "I'll never be as good as that but I'll have a go at them anyway."

More surprisingly there is also a Spanish-language song on the album, 'Amapola', sung by Dunphy in what to my monolingual ears sounds like the most perfect Spanish.

I don't speak Spanish but I found some videos on YouTube and wrote the lyrics down phonetically for myself. I didn't get them checked out by anybody who does speak Spanish – so I could be asking for a bag of

kittens!

Another track *In My Girlish Days* was originally by the great, guitar-playing American blues singer [Memphis Minnie](#), whose career lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s. The legendary [Maria Muldaur](#), who Dunphy supported on a memorable tour of Ireland, turned her on to Memphis Minnie.

When I first met Maria she was going, "Oh, darling, I think you should do some of her tracks." And she gave me a CD and I did learn two of the songs and put that one on the EP.

Dunphy regards her experience touring with Muldaur as transformative. Indeed her admiration for the New Yorker, who originally performed on the Greenwich Village and Boston folk scenes with the *Even Dozen Jug Band* and the *Jim Kweskin Jug Band* before becoming a rock superstar with her hit record *Midnight At The Oasis*, is palpable.

The tour was brilliant. Maria was amazing, not just as a performer but as a person. I travelled for a week with her and her band, who were lovely people, and the craic was just brilliant.

Whenever we stopped for meals I would try and sit beside Maria to hear some of her stories but not only was I interested in her, she was interested in me too. It wasn't just one way. She was asking about myself and about my family so we had great talks.

And I never tired of listening to her and her band and how they did their show and the way it could change. You could listen to them over and over and you'd never get bored. It was very uplifting and that rubbed off on me.

Trying to make a living in Northern Ireland playing blues and jazz-influenced music can be depressing and frustrating. Dunphy acknowledges that she has struggled with that reality and the feeling of being an outsider but believes that working and hanging out with Muldaur and her band revitalised her.

Sometimes I get a wee bit disillusioned and feel disconnected from why I chose the music that I do in the first place.

You can feel a wee bit alone in your choice at times. In my teens I was listening to old, old stuff and music from New Orleans and jazz and blues and soul and Otis Redding and I was the only girl at my school that liked anything like that. Everybody else was listening to Bros so it was a lonely choice for a teenage girl and it can still be a lonely choice as you get older. You need to be surrounded by it to feel connected to it again, to make it come alive again and to remember everything that you liked about it in the first place. And that's what was really, really good about that week because they were the real deal and I was soaking it up, the whole week. It did me the world of good.

Remarkably, Muldaur has also declared that she regards Dunphy as 'the real deal.' Dunphy, not surprisingly, is thrilled with the compliment.

I was absolutely chuffed. And I don't like blowing my own trumpet but I'll tell you this wee thing: Maria's piano player heard me do a Robert Johnson song and I was telling the audience that I got it from [celebrated New York blues singer-guitarist] Rory Block and he said, "We've worked with Rory Block and I prefer your version!" So that was a huge compliment.

The Grooveyard Shift are led by guitarist Artie McGlynn, long regarded as one of Ireland's greatest and most influential musicians. Dunphy acknowledges McGlynn's greatness and his crucial role in developing the one original song on the EP, the title track *Don't Wait Up For Me*:

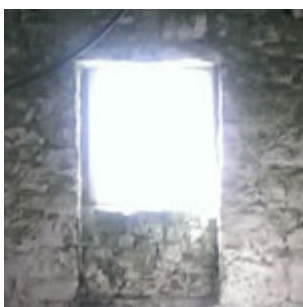
He's a master and we are only at his shoulders in comparison. And he really helped me shape that song. Jerome [McGlynn, Artie's son and co-guitarist in the Grooveyard Shift] and I had worked on it and we were missing something when Artie came along and sprinkled Artie magic on it and brought to it what was missing and made it so much better. And I went, "Aha, now it's happening!" He's brilliant.

The Grooveyard Shift frequently play on Monday nights in McCann's Bar in Omagh. The unassuming local provides the perfect, low-key home base for the band. "It's a great music bar and there's a great atmosphere," says Dunphy, "It doesn't have great space and there's no stage so we're all squished into a corner on top of each other but we love playing there."

Updated by **Trevor Hodgett** from an interview first published in June 2014 on [Culture Northern Ireland](#)

Maeve Dunphy and her band will soon be gigging in Enniskillen.

More information from her [Facebook page](#).



Common Ground

You and I are already connected
so deeply related – bound by invisible kinship
beyond this window into which you peer.

Let's return to common ground
to walk with each other in silence
and remember together
our place in the family of things.

I have to thank you for this opportunity to share about the arts programme developing in [Common Ground](#), the new 25 acre center in Tattenabuddagh near Fivemiletown. I have taken my writing outdoors, sat with the trees and grasses whilst planting Hazel, Rowan Birch and Willow. As a boy I used to listen to the Corncrake in these fields.

Robert Graves, in his poetic manifesto *The White Goddess*, wrote that modern poetry's function was to lay bare the results of humanity's break from the rest of nature:

Once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born ... it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in science, philosophy and industry, and brought ruin upon himself and his family.

Common Ground has a mission – that the farm will be a place where people will come to deepen their awareness of their relationship with themselves and each other, with a clear primary focus on nature and the other than human beings that inhabit its spaces.

Thomas Berry, the writer and eco-philosopher proposes that we are entering the "Eozoic Age" where we must reestablish our connection to nature and work toward sustainable lifestyles that reverse the destruction we are currently inflicting on the planet. We as human beings now have that responsibility to care for and help the 'earth community' developing and flourish again.

We hope to engage all kinds of people – those new to any kind of creative/artistic activity and those already established in a practice. We know there are many ways of relating to ourselves in nature through our creativity and hence we are offering a range of expressive arts – [writing](#), [land art](#), [environmental movement](#), [music](#) and [storytelling](#). We recognize that these relationships are dynamic – our sense of connection changes, yet we are always connected in nameable and unnamed ways to the nature all around us. This is a way of engaging in the biggest challenge of our time – the unfolding reality of environmental degradation and the catastrophic effects of climate change on Earth's life.

Our primary concern is that people have the experience of being part of nature as a living breathing whole, and that they embody the experience. The expression of it does not necessarily have to be in poetry, art or prose – if they walk away changed by the experience of being here, more connected and alive – then our job is done.

'Whatever great, beautiful, or significant experiences have come our way must not be recalled again from without and recaptured, as it were; they must rather become part of the tissue of our inner life from the outset, creating a new and better self within us, continuing forever as active agents in our [becoming].' (Goethe)

If you would like learn more or get involved then visit the [website](#) – or come to our [Annual Gathering](#) on 20th August.

Robbie Breadon has worked in complementary health for 25 years and is co-founder of [Ecotherapy Kernow](#)



[Living Legacies](#)

For two days, on the banks of the Erne surrounded by the historic buildings of the Watergate, Maguire Castle and Inniskillings Barracks, the Living Legacies team worked in intense creativity with two writers groups, the Fermanagh Writers and the Omagh Robins.

The *Living Legacies 2016 Writers' Summer School* was a new departure for the Engagement Centre. The Centre was established in January 2014 as one of five First World War Engagement Centres in the UK which work alongside community groups to explore the war period and its meaning for people today. It includes academics working at Glasgow, Newcastle, Queen's and Ulster Universities, amongst others, who have teamed with community groups, museum experts and people across the heritage and cultural sectors to produce new knowledge and understanding of the period.

The *Summer School* built upon previous initiatives events hosted by Living Legacies, including: Medals All Round Research Initiative (MARRI), which resulted in *Of Bicycles and Fallow Fields*, a WW1 drama written and performed by Omagh Robins; the event *Music and Memories* held at the Inniskillings Museum in June 2015, during which musician Tracey MacRory talked about the wartime inspiration for her music; and the visit of the Fermanagh Writers to Northern Ireland War Memorial in March 2016.

The writers made new and deeper connections with the Living Legacies team; learned from the experiences of Marion Maxwell, Bellanaleck History Group,

and their Cleenish Island project funded by HLF *First World War Then and Now* scheme; and made new friends within the recently amalgamated of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. The two days represented not only a significant time commitment from the participants, but also one that would challenge their preconceptions of the war period and why we should remember. By the end they had produced new work, learned new skills about their craft, and had greater understanding of the impact and legacy of the First World War period.

For the Living Legacies team the two days provided an invaluable insight into the multiple meanings that can be drawn from the war period and how each person constructs that past in a way that has relevance for their contemporary lives. Collaborations were lively, the mood was one of generosity and mindfulness, and the work read on the final day was moving and deeply insightful.

Looking to the future, the new work will be read at the *Literature of Irish Exile* 17th Annual Autumn School: *The Great War in Memory, Writing and Drama* on Saturday October 15th at the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster American Folk Park. The afternoon will be devoted to community creative response to the First World War in readings and performances of newly composed poetry, prose and drama from the Fermanagh Writers Group, the Omagh Robins WW1 Drama Group (MARRI project), and others.

The Living Legacies team of Elizabeth Crooke, Johanne Devlin Trew (both Ulster University) and Kurt Taroff (Queen's University Belfast) would like to thank all the participants who contributed so enthusiastically to the School. Our gratitude is also extended to Sarah McHugh, Curator and Manager Fermanagh County Museum, who made us very welcome on site and provided a tour of historic buildings.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Inniskillings Museum to the School – Director Neil Armstrong spoke warmly to the group about his pleasure welcoming the Writers to Castle Barracks; he mounted the travelling exhibition *Inniskillings and World War One* in our venue and provided a First World War handling collection for the duration of the School. His colleague Natasha Martin provided the group with an impressive tour of the First World War sections of the permanent galleries in the Inniskillings Museum. We would also like to thank playwright and Director Brenda Winter Palmer who facilitated the workshops so skilfully, with a balance of creativity and thoughtfulness which forged an atmosphere conducive to high quality writing.

Elizabeth Crooke and Johanne Devlin Trew



Forgotten Song

Mullaghfad church, built in 1831 and without electricity, nestles in the heart of the forest on Sliabh Beagh. On the night of 1st July it provided the perfect setting for *Sliabh Beagh Arts* to create an immersive arts space which would showcase the array of projects they had created over the last year.





There was an exhibition of sculpture, puppets, photography & film, and live music performances from *Sonic Lotus*, *Tully*, and *Cup o'Joe* in addition to emerging young musicians Louie Bannon and Casper McCabe. The church was lit by candles and fairy lights. Outside in the warm evening straw bales and Swedish lanterns transformed the space and provided the perfect backdrop for an evening of storytelling through song and quality community arts.

[Sliabh Beagh Arts](#) is made up of 13 community groups who reside within or near the mountain which straddles the border between the counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan, an area that has been disadvantaged due to isolation, social deprivation, and poor community relations.

Since 2001 they have played an active role in strengthening the arts infrastructure within the area, building partnerships and aiding regeneration through quality rural Arts provision. Through their annual programme they have animated, fostered and promoted contacts and collaboration across the community and across the border, using Visual Arts, Music, Sculpture, Environmental Arts, Photography, Literature, Digital Media, Ceramics, Performance and Exhibition to facilitate the growth of creativity within the area.

This year, the *Growth & Decay* programme is focused on a number of innovative rural initiatives including Gate Weaving, [Graffiti Bales](#), [Barn Murals](#) and Limerick Lanes – all of which use familiar features such as dirty barn walls, six-bar metal field gates, concrete lanes and silage bales to add quality art to the local landscape and the everyday lives of farming communities, encouraging not only local participation but also enquiries from passers-by.

All of the work produced relies heavily on the local artists who facilitate the projects: Lisa McCabe, Sinead Connolly, Annie-June Callaghan, Charlie Clifford, Max Carnson, Olivia Johnson Murphy, Patrick McCabe, Elaine Agnew and Kevin McHugh.

They work closely with local schools, bringing programmes of animation, puppetry, storytelling and song to the area. They are all highly talented

individuals who are dedicated and passionate about making the arts accessible and available within a rural context, and about passing their skills and experience on to the participants.

The support received from local community groups and volunteers allows the organization to develop projects which have relevance and meaning to the communities involved. Welcomed by teachers, parents and pupils the workshops add creativity and enjoyment to the school curriculum in addition to introducing new skills and inspiration to the youth of the area.

Slieve Beagh Arts are supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and are recognised as a leading contributor to the quality and richness of rural arts within Northern Ireland. Now in their 13th year, they are continuously evolving. With a new Digital Media and Ceramics studio opened in Corranny last year, they are building solid foundations for future developments and sustainability.

Donna Bannon is coordinator of Slieve Beagh Arts



[Elemenopy](#)

Elemenopy – the feeling you get when reciting the middle of the alphabet, is a key ingredient in Colm Keegan’s creative writing workshops, whether working with adults or younger, whether it’s poetry, screenwriting, short stories, rap, or songwriting. Whatever it is, it doesn’t matter. Everything starts with ELEMENOPY.

Remember learning the alphabet?

You’re five or so and thinking, “are you serious?”

The Length of it!

It goes all around the classroom!”

Then a while after that, the teacher points at you and says “Ok, tell me the alphabet.”

You stand up in front of the whole class, probably your first performance

ever, and you begin, not knowing if you'll make it to the end. The Z feels miles away.

A B C D E F G H I J K

ELEMENOPY.

you hit it,

the sweet spot at the heart of the alphabet

the free and easy feeling of just going with it and not caring

You're thinking Happy Days! I can do this! I'm almost there!

You don't care, you're just in it.

That's Elemenopy. That feeling. The secret ingredient in all great poetry, all great writing, and all great art.

Think about the first time you have to stand up to somebody, somebody you are afraid of, somebody who is putting you down, who has you backed into a corner. You feel your feelings swirl around in your stomach, like wasps in a jar, you try and keep it in but eventually it gets too much, you feel a heat in your neck or your cheeks go red, you feel the feelings rising up in your throat and before you know it you're saying what you were afraid to say.

It's out.

The other person backs off, agog.

And you're thinking. Woh, did I actually say that?

That sounded great, that was a proper smackdown!

That's Elemenopy.

Or when you fall in love, and there's nothing you can do about it anymore, you have to let them know, you have to go in for that first kiss, you know you could lose everything but it's inevitable, you can't help yourself.

That's Elemenopy too.

Sometimes your life feels like the surface of a still lake, and a moment hits and you feel the ripples flow out from you and back in again. It can be a good thing or a bad thing. Everything syncs up and you're thinking

"I'm alive. This is what it feels like to be alive. I am going through something, and on the other side of what's happening right now I will never be the same again."

When you record those moments, that's poetry.

The poet Ted Hughes was obsessed with catching animals.

He caught foxes, rabbits, birds, frogs, everything.

At one time he went to school with 40 mice in his jacket.

Then he grew up.

He stopped catching animals and started writing poems and he said once that they are the same thing.

Have you ever caught a butterfly?

You don't clap your hands on it and slap it on the table and go, "YUSS! I caught a butterfly! It's a pancake now but so what."

You do it with care, it is a considerate act. You can catch your feelings and your memories the same way.

Have you ever read Seamus Heaney's *Mid-Term Break*?

Everybody feels the same punch in the gut when they reach the last line.

"A four foot box, a foot for every year."

He took that moment and handled it with such humility and grace.

If you catch a moment right, and put it into words, it can live on, it can live longer than you.

There are words written thousands of years ago and the feeling behind them still lives on, every time somebody comes along and opens that book, it's like the butterfly flies back out.

Good writing isn't just about words, it's about Elemenopy. Put the feelings first. Start with the heart, and the art will come.

Colm Keegan led a workshop for Fermanagh Writers in April. He hosts the [Kingfisher Writers' Retreat](#) in Dublin

Colm Keegan [reads Elemenopy](#) [Soundcloud]

Seamus Heaney [reads Midterm Break](#) [Poetry Ireland YouTube]