



Foreign but Not Alien

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

Now the same people seem prophetic.

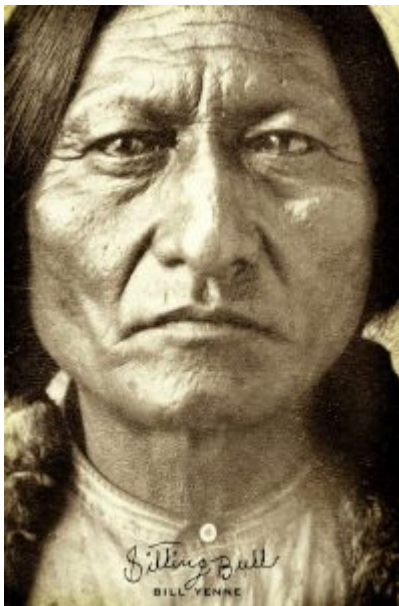
Now we see more clearly the internal rhymes of history itself. John D Kelly's *At Standing Rock* links Sitting Bull and the Battle of Little Bighorn with the recent [protests](#) against the Dakota pipeline. Both were iconic; both ultimately unsuccessful. We remember the defeats, we grieve the world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

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

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

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

At Standing Rock



April 1st 2016

It is 1876.
Sitting Bull stands
silent and alone in the dark
on Standing Rock.

He awaits sight of Mother
Nature's beautiful plain.

The proud Sioux Chief
then sits
with eagle-eyed,
head-dressed head in hands
crying into the mist
on the cusp of morning.

No one else
has yet awakened in the camp.

The day is dawning
long before the *clever clocks* –
the ones on silver chains
that shun a need for sun –
march in on the lily-white chests
of timeless men with guns

in the inside pockets
of brass-buttoned uniforms.

He carries
the heavy gift of holy sight,
looks out into the future
of his Great People

but sees only blood
stretch out
in a bleeding delta
of generations
as far as his mind's eye
can bear to see.

A raven flies overhead
and casts a dark shadow
on the red clay, on stone,
onto a tree trunk; and
then – after it glides low
across the rosy-fingered
sky – fleetingly it lands
on the sacred back
of a lone white buffalo
standing conspicuous
in the innocence
of the sleeping, steaming herd.

It too lifts its heavy head.
It too wants to bellow aloud.

He cries-out (silently) again;
sweats blood, unseen.

He remembers the vast herds
of his childhood.

They are both all eyes and ears
and nostrils. They scent the wind.

His heart bears the searing heat
and pain of inevitability.

It will be a short-lived victory
at Little Bighorn.

He knows this, but will not tell
his beautiful fresh-faced Braves.

Many will die there
but at least they will hold some
hope and love in their hearts;
and feel alive before they bleed.

*

Those mighty bellows echo
through to this day
and – in their wake –
that proud and tenacious race
with no rush for oil

(the new fools' liquid gold)
rides in again on horseback,
two hundred strong,
to stand for hope here
in this ugly face of greed.

John D. Kelly

The photograph is from the cover of Bill Yenne's book [Sitting Bull](#)

The Photograph

Auld Tomás squints back at me, exactly as I remember
Peering up through the curling, yellowed years
From the bottom of the shoebox.
He lounges, propped against the Aga,
Brows bristling-stern beneath an acrid, vaporous halo;
Eternally smoking in his holy sock-soles.

There was another photograph I think, older still.
A young man caught astride a bicycle,
Grinning wide in a dusty lane on an August evening,
Squeeze-box bouncing from his shoulder,
Off to play for the dancing.
I don't know where it went.

Somewhere along the line, it slipped-
Out of mind, out of mention, out of memory;
Like the music of those distant evenings.
Like the lassie with the hair like a jackdaw's wing
Who was asked a quiet question once,
But turned her face away.

Perhaps she chose another's name,
And lives around here still- I never knew.
The young man asked in earnest, so Auntie said,
But she shook her head and slipped away.
He did not smile so much then,
And eventually the accordion went away.

So did the dancing, and the bicycle.
No other was asked to the house, so Granny said,
Out of earshot in the yard one day,
Pressed by childhood's curiosity.
Eight brothers and sisters, a farm-
Responsibility filled the plodding years.

The young man is gone now, and the girl,
And even this old man who loomed
Grizzled and gruff in my early memories
And slipped us hard-boiled sweeties
When Mammy wasn't watching.
And never spoke about himself.

I wonder about these hushed little stories;
Dewdrops that rest,
Quivering, just for a moment
Before they roll and drip,
Sighing,
From the branches of our family trees.

Jude Alexzander

Jude Alexzander now lives near Belfast with her very tolerant family and a rabble of spoilt rescue animals. She studied English at Aberdeen and writes poetry and short stories. She blogs at judealexzander.com.



Sweet Spot

(Lower Lough Erne viewed from Claragh Road, Blaney)

Each morning,
I grasp the curtains with tired hands
and fling my arms wide.
Rings rattle in retreat on their rail
as the Fermanagh Monet fills my frame.
I await the lift like a cradled child.

Sun tackles showers on in-between days,
sprinkles of rainbow are cast upon isles.
Boats, speckle the lough like white chocolate chips
rippling the mirrored reflection of sky.
My eyes soak it up as the day kicks in,
I float away on a natural high.

Each night, I take a closing fix.

Through the shadows,
Irvinestown twinkles a smile.
A handful of jewels,
draped on the end of one arm,
while I perch content on the other side.

Trish Bennett

This poem was previously published in *The Bee's Breakfast* anthology, by Beautiful Dragons, edited by Rebecca Bilkau, in 2017. Each poem in the book represents a region in the United Kingdom. *Sweet Spot* represents County Fermanagh. It was also used in the Label Lit project (organised by Maria McManus), in 2018 and 2019.

[Hear](#) Trish read the poem.

[Borderlines](#)



I remember the Border when it was a Border
before the Common Market as we called it then
when everyone had tales about the old times
smuggling the everyday – butter, sugar –
shopping bags hung on the outside handles of train carriages.
Jokes about *wetting the tay*.

We were the Protestants who crossed the border
each July to avoid the bands
heading for the sea in Donegal or all the way
to Cork, my uncle's farm.

The green triangle on my mother's Morris Minor
showed that we would return.

We hoped the weather would be fine,
the Customs men at Pettigo be sitting in the sun
and wave us through, for Pettigo
was easy that way, as we knew
not like Belleek.

And then
we'd keep an eye for green An Post vans
or signs that said *Go Mall* to show
that this was not our land
though otherwise, it was the same
round humping hills and winding lanes
and sudden loughs.

And I recall the Border when it was a Border
once again, with concrete blocks
and corrugated towers
and helicopters hung like moths –
beating the sky
above the humping hills and winding lanes
and sudden loughs.

The Customs sheds were gone, but borders now
closed round us tight
with kerb-side colours, tattered flags
X marks the spot
and, *Don't go out tonight*.
You don't know who might be about
and don't trust anyone who says
Brits Out does not mean you.

Yet, even in the worst of times
when no one drove
round humping hills, the lanes still wound
past sudden loughs
to stop in block or crater or in broken bridge.
If you knew where to look, you still might find
some place to pass a bike, some tractor track
to bind it back.

It's not a Border if there's no way through.

Jenny Brien



Rosie

The shiny black nose nudges me
and the beloved ball,
sticky, nicely slimed,
appears at the top of my notebook.

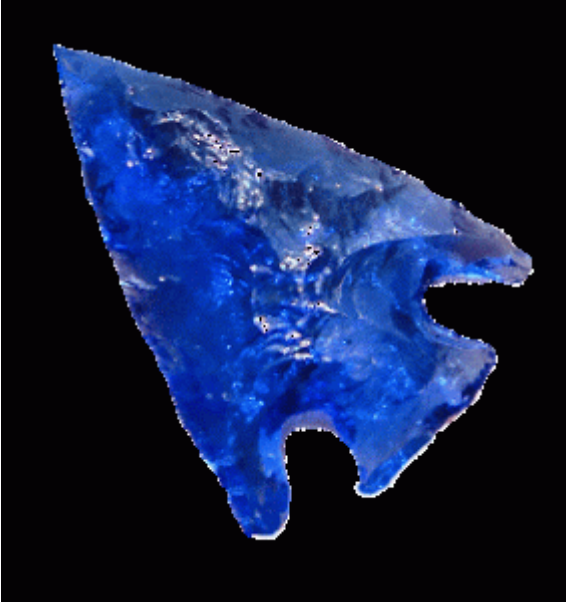
The ball rolls slowly down
the paper raised on my knees,
distributing dampness as it goes,
re-arranging words as liquid loosens them.

Two brown eyes as large as love itself
stare with the skill of a professional hypnotist
as the wet nose rests
over my words.

Rosie, the collie dog,
with her white toothed smile
and seal black whiskers, who believes firmly
in the importance of play,
waves her tail in triumph
as I put down the white paper in surrender.

Jenny Methven

The Glass Arrowhead



The Dead, they see a little at a time.

They go South. They jump through the hole into the other world.

They walk around on the ground. Then they whirl. The whirlwind, people say.

They go up in the sky on a rope, the Dead.

The man they called Ishi did not wish to disturb the Dead. He would not talk of them or say their names, though Kroeber asked him many questions. For forty years he had seen them die. He could count them all, and there was no one left for whom he would singe his hair in mourning. These were his tribe now; Kroeber and Watterman and the doctor, Saxton Pope. He liked his room at the Museum in Berkley, and riding on the tram, eating with Watterman's family and playing with the children in the park. He did not even mind the Sunday mornings when he was on show. He would sit in front of the wikiup that he had built in the grounds and knap arrowheads out of blue seltzer glass. So many arrowheads – more in a day than he would ever have used in a year of hunting. When each was finished, he would hold it out to one of the many watching children who would come forward, shy as a deer, and sometimes hold it up to the light and exclaim how pretty it was. But to Ishi the glass was simply good to work, hard and true, not like the black obsidian stone. He'd learned that many years before he came to this place, and he remembered the risks he would take for one glass bottle.

This was his home now. So many people, past counting, like the swarms of butterflies that arrived each spring. This was where he would happily choose to die, but as he remembered it came to him that one day the city's swarm might vanish like the butterflies and he would be left alone again. Perhaps that is why at last he yielded to his friends' request that he bring them to his old hunting grounds, back to the Dead.

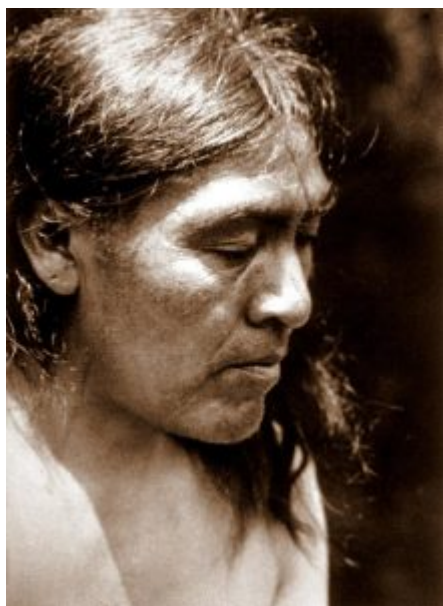
On horseback, they followed the rushing waters of Deer Creek, up from the Sacramento Valley and into the foothills of the snowcapped mountains. There were five of them: Ishi, Kroeber and Watterman, the doctor and the doctor's young son. He watched the back of the rancher who guided them, and he remembered the names. He raised his eyes to the faraway ridge of Bear's Hideout. It was six years since White men had last been there, late Fall, surveyors, who found the wikiup of Ishi's people.

There were only four of his tribe left then; Ishi, his sister, their mother and her brother. The old man was so frail he could only move with help. Ishi's sister took him to the hiding place by the river at Harpoon Landing. Their mother was too old and sick to move. Ishi covered her with a hide blanket and hid himself. One of the men had a kind voice, she said later. He told the others not to kill her.

The rancher brought Ishi and his friends to his home and made them welcome. He showed them Indian artefacts that he had found, so he said, in an abandoned hut. Ishi watched Kroeber bargain for them, to bring them back to the museum. He knew each one – the bows, the salmon harpoons, the stone tools and the blankets – all that they had prepared to survive the coming season. It was a hard and hungry winter when his mother died. The others never returned. He had searched for them for three years before fire and hunger drove him South.

They travelled on towards Bears Hideout the next day, leaving the ranch and the rancher behind. That night, Ishi told the doctor's son he heard the spirit of his sister calling and walked off alone into the bush.

He walked until he came to Harpoon Landing. He sat and watched the waters of Deer Creek as they rolled away in the moonlight. He remembered when he was a child. He remembered the night the hunters came, and the sudden strange barking of the rifles. He felt again the chill of the water as he floated downstream among the dead bodies of his kinsfolk. He wondered why the white men were so anxious to pull them out again; then he saw the knives. Heads five dollars apiece, scalps fifty cents.



He closed his eyes and pictured the distant sea, and the great city by its shore. Whether it was vision or memory, he did not know – he saw a child with a dark, flat face like his, holding a blue glass arrowhead up to the sunlight. And it was beautiful.

He listened. He heard the coyote call and the wood duck, and he was at peace. He called the Dead by name and they came to him. Each greeted him by his name, the name that was not Ishi. One by one they came to him. His mother was there, and her brother, but his sister was not with them.

In the morning, he told them, I will go to my friends and show them what I may of this land. When we are done, we will return to the city by the sea and I will never speak your names again. But tonight, let us sing the old songs together.

So they sang.

They sang the songs of Coyote and of Wood Duck, though there was no one else in the world of the Living who could understand.

Except, perhaps, somewhere in the city by the sea, an old woman and a child with a blue glass arrowhead.

Jenny Brien

Magheralough Primary School



So – here we are tonight on the longest day of the year, closing the doors of Magheralough Primary school.

The closure of Magheralough is not merely the closing of a quaint, rural school building. It is the closing of an educational community, the closure of a learning community and the closure of a social community which dates back hundreds of years.

Education did not just start with the opening of Magheralough on the 16th of May 1885, nor did it start with the opening of Stranagummer in 1832.

There must have been a strong community and a particularly strong educational tradition in the area which enabled Reverend Irvine to build a school just behind that that laurel hedge, fill it with pupils and staff it with local teachers. He was ahead of his time and would have seen the school as an experiment in learning.

Through the centuries that educational tradition has stayed vibrant. As Principal of this community, I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to undertake my own learning experiment. One where educational

love, the love of learning, the treating of children as partners in their teaching has shown me that bigger is not always necessarily better. There is the widely held belief that larger teaching units are more effective but my experience here, what I have heard from parents and children, and particularly the quality of work I have witnessed the children produce day in and day out here in Magheralough suggests we have the evidence to challenge the untested rush towards rationalisation.

This school has produced past pupils such as Patrick Kelly who has a statue built in his memory in Bombay in India, and Hugh Hetherington who died in the First World War in battle in 1917 and is buried at Vimy Ridge. Past pupils from here have made their mark in countries all over the world and many others who have stayed in Ireland have made valuable contributions to the fabric of society here.

Yet here we are tonight on the longest day of the year, closing the doors of Magheralough Primary school.

There is always damage to lives when financial and administrative rationalisation becomes more important than the people it is going to affect. Magheralough is a unique community whose future has been decided by people and institutions who have no relation to this place or an understanding of the vital role which a learning community plays in the well-being of society, who have no idea how this community unites people from different religions and beliefs. Have no idea, even though the education inspectorate told them so, of the quality of education and experience being offered to children who attended over the last three years. The chance to further and deepen these understandings has been lost.

Because here we are tonight on the longest day of the year, closing the doors of Magheralough Primary school

But all should not be lost. Before the Father Matt Hall was built this school was the centre for dances, evening classes – it was a centre for a community coming together.

My sad duty as a Principal is to turn the keys for the last time on Magheralough School. However, my fervent hope is that all of you here tonight will restore the loss done to this community by turning this idyllic place into a centre for community learning of an informal kind, of the kind envisaged by Father Matt all those years ago.

So – here we are tonight on the longest day of the year, closing the doors of Magheralough Primary school.

There are many I need to thank. I will not name them. They know who they are. Suffice to say there is not a key anywhere in the universe strong enough to close the doors of our hearts to the time we have had here. We walk away from the locked doors of Magheralough sad, perhaps even heartbroken – but immensely proud.

Thank you

An Ambush for the Imagination

I'm a big fan of writing workshops. It doesn't matter to me what the genre is; I find that I can always learn something new about the craft of writing. I write poetry primarily so, naturally, I am a little more excited when the session is tutored by a poet. In August 2018 Fermanagh Writers hosted well-known Dublin poet and writer [Colm Keegan](#) for a full-day workshop. Colm called it *Poetry in Motion* and during the course of the day he certainly kept our pens in motion. He also said it was *an ambush for your imagination* and that was very true in my case.

Colm has a definition for poetry that I find intriguing; he calls it:

ELEMENOPY

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. If you catch a moment right, and put it into words, it can live on, it can live longer than you. When you record those moments, that's poetry. Have you ever caught a butterfly? You do it with care, it is a considerate act. You can catch your feelings and your memories the same way. Good writing isn't just about words, it's about Elemenopy. Put the feelings first. Start with the heart and the art will come.

He has an enormous enthusiasm for passing on his knowledge of writing and poetry to anyone who will listen. He certainly had a willing audience on that August Saturday. He got all of us to attempt to write six poems in an hour that day and most of us obliged. I managed to write six and I will share two of them with you now. The first is a serious poem about my father and the second is a whimsical memory from my childhood.

My Dad Didn't Cry

*I left all my tears on your sister's coffin,
he took me in his arms and whispered
when I asked him
Daddy, why don't you cry?
I barely remembered her.
Too young to understand
that he was always grieving,
I carried on believing*

that my Dad didn't cry.
Years after he died my uncle
told the story of Patricia's funeral.

I'm sorry daddy

now I know why

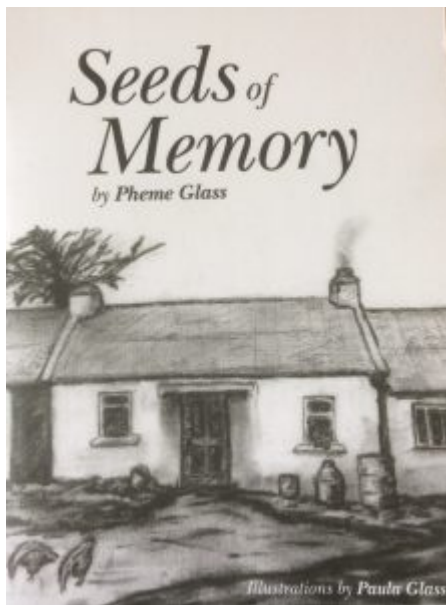
you didn't cry

The Reader

My siblings always interfered
so I found a place to be,
where I could go inside my mind
and set my spirit free.
I used to lock the bathroom door
to keep the world outside,
and explore a universe inside
the book upon the floor.

John Monaghan

Summer Holiday



Our Granny lived about two miles outside Plumbridge in County Tyrone and we lived in Cookstown. No distance in today's travel; but back in 1952, it was as far away as Cork if you didn't have a car. Buses stopped at every hole in the hedge and took an eternity, never mind the price of the ticket.

Our transport to the 'Plumb' came in the shape of our neighbour, Johnny Robinson. On the 16th of every month, Johnny and his sister Maggie travelled from Cookstown to Plumbridge to sell new and second-hand clothes to local farmers and villagers at the fair. Mammy made all the arrangements and a

letter to Granny was dispatched to finalise the date and time of our arrival.

The day of our journey began bright and early at 7 am, with Johnny calling out *All aboard! All aboard! Next stop Plumbridge!* Winking at Mammy, he would rub his hands together and say *How much profit will I make at the fair on this cargo?* through much laughing and nervous giggling, we scrambled into the back of the van and climbed high to the top of the bundle of clothes. My brother, displaying all the cockiness of having done it before, made no attempt to help me as I struggled to the top of the pile.

We lurched out of the alley into the street and at each change of gear the van seemed to hesitate as if to challenge Johnny's ability to control its momentum. But then, as if by some preconceived arrangement, the van and driver synchronised and the hum of the motor became like a lullaby to us and we fell asleep.

The noise and the bustle of the village woke us, opening the door to another way of life. Sheep bleating, cows mooing, and all the smells that accompanied it hit our senses as we tumbled out onto the road. Rubbing the sleep from our eyes and clutching our brown parcels of clothes, we could not quite believe that we had arrived.

The little red van was parked outside the Post Office, and after much banter and hand slapping with the postman, Johnny handed us over to be delivered to Granny's, minus the appropriate postage stamps of course!

Pulling up on the street we saw Granny, her tall frame wrapped in her black flowery pinny, attempting to conceal her amusement as the postman announced: *I have two large parcels for you today Mrs Campbell.*

As he opened the back doors we jumped out with squeals of laughter shouting *Surprise! Surprise!* to be scooped up in her arms, scattering chickens and ducks from around her feet in a flurry of excitement. The summer holiday had begun.

Granny

When I think of her now she is not in the
shadow of a cold grave
but a loving memory.

Her tall frame, always the same
wrapped in her pinny.
The clog boots covered in
orange soot from the wide hearth
as she piled the hot coals on the
lid that hid the golden bread.
Head bent in the paraffin glow
cleaning the eggs row by row
for Doherty's egg man,
who came in the red van.
His moneybag rattling over
his back as he stacked the

boxes up on the rack.
Those familiar boxes that made my bed
where I laid my head.

Patching and mending
the thimble pushing the needle through
coarse cloth. Her thoughts her own
in that warm home.

She sewed these seeds of memory

The Well

The well is dry Granny said
dry as a bone, not a drip or drop
to fill the pot.
Take the buckets and go up to Stark's
tell them that our well is dry and
I'll call myself bye-the-bye.
Be sure to rinse them at
the head of the well they should be
clean but you never can tell.
Don't fill them up to the very top
or you'll spill the half of what you've got.
I'd go myself but the pains are bad and you're
a healthy strappin' lad.

The buckets filled, he headed down the road
his wellies fillin' as he strolled.
He stopped beside a blackberry
bush, the berries ripe and tasty.
In his haste to go, he spilt the lot
the wellies full the buckets empty.

PHEME GLASS

This story and two poems are in her book *Seeds of Memory*, self-published in 2013. She read the story on *BBC Radio Ulster* in July 2005 as part of the 'My Story' series.

This love of the village of Plumbridge at the foothills of the beautiful Sperrin Mountains has also been her inspiration in writing *The Blossom or the Bole* in 2017, a novel based on facts of events of 1912 leading up to WW1. She is currently writing the sequel, which will be available 2019/20.