

The Spirit of the Place



For the ancient pagans, they say, every sacred place was haunted by a familiar spirit – *the genius loci* – something less than a god but equally uncanny: some dryad, naiad, elf or goblin. Dinnseanachas or placelore was one of the earliest forms of Irish vernacular writing. Every hill, river and road, sacred or not, once had its story. They still do. So this issue of Corncrake is all about Place, or rather particular places, and what they mean to people.

It began with our publication of Loughshore Lines, an anthology of poems and stories inspired by the Erne. Twenty eight writers contributed some 37 pieces, and some of the same writer appear again here. But this time we have cast the net wider, and so there are contributions from each of the four provinces. From Mayo there is Margaret Kiernan's Leave the Calling-Card; Kenneth Hickey has two fine poems about the harbour of Cobh, Fallen Giants and The Great Isle; Eric Greaves takes us to Cheney's Hill in Wicklow; Carole Farnan to the new Farset River Park in Belfast for Haibun (winter); and Dorothy O'Kane gives us Autumn by the Roe near Limavady.

Coming closer to home, we have China Girl Sleeping on the Goldline Express bus – while just south of the Fermanagh border Helen Pinoff sings Glenaniff's River Song; and Ken Ramsey the Cavan Burren (in a poem submitted to the Geopark Poetry Map). Finally, in Fermanagh, Dianne Ascroft reveals the roots of here story of Lakeland Lines, What Water Reveals, and Dermot Maguire takes us to his favourite field in the townland of Derrylea.

These are just a few of the many places on this island that are in some sense sacred. Because people have loved them, cared for them, and written about them, we may say that they have Soul.

Soul always has a story. You may not know what it is, but it is there. A thing, a place, a person with Soul was not always what they are now. They are far from an ideal dedicated to one purpose; they are much more than they appear at first sight. It is almost a cliché now that our ancestors knew these as 'thin places' – places so full of Soul that their forgotten story shines obscurely through like a medieval painting of a English saint from

under Puritan whitewash.

Sometimes the stories are still told, even when their original meaning is long forgotten. Why is it unlucky to cut down a fairy thorn? No one knows, but we have our suspicions. Perhaps there really were dryads after all.

Jenny Brien

Painting: *Fairy Thorn near Muckish* by Jim Holmes