

The Year the World Stood Still

✘ The end of 2019 was a busy time for Fermanagh Writers. We had been involved as writers and performers in two dramatic presentations directed by Paddy McEneaney: our own *The Ghost of Christy Past* for the Fermanagh Live festival, and *The Gods of Sound and Stone* in the Strule Arts Centre, and we were looking forward to a new project *Better Together* in conjunction with Ballinamore Hens Shed. I had been in hospital with a clot on the lung, and we all needed a rest before the next issue of *Corncrake*. There would certainly be plenty to write about.

Then Covid arrived.

I had made a half-hearted attempt to bring an issue out last March, but with only a few articles promised and no new events to review, it was clear that was not going to happen. Even before lockdown started, I went into isolation for the sake of my damaged lungs. I began to hear stories of others who were less fortunate than myself. Caiman O'Shea, co-founder of *Corncrake*, became critically ill with Covid, one of the first casualties. When we gathered at a safe social distance for Kathy May's funeral, it was the first time we writers, who used to meet weekly, had seen each other for nearly three months. At that time, everyone seemed to be writing about their experience of Covid, but really – what was there to say? It was too soon to tell.

The year rolled on. Summer became winter, and we all became accustomed to the peculiarities of Zoom. Caiman, thankfully, has recovered well. New projects started, and we began to make new friends who we never had met in the flesh. As Anita Gracey has pointed out in *Valuable Not Vulnerable*, for some this is normal – indeed, an improvement on normal. The cyberpunk future has at last distributed itself as far as Fermanagh.

So now it is a year later, and the worst that we feared has not come to pass. If not yet the beginning of the end, it is at least the end of the beginning, and there is much to talk about.

Here again are Teresa Kane, John James, Ken Ramsey and Kate O'Shea, and established poets new to *Corncrake*, with Amanda May's *Untitled*, a tribute to her late sister; Anita Gracey's *Somebody Must*; storyteller Paddy Montague's whimsical *Do Things a bit Different* and Brendan O' Tuathalain's *Ghosts*.

Many books have been published over the past years and we feature three by writers familiar to *Corncrake*: the second part of *The Blossom or the Bole* by Pheme Glass, *The Lost Garden of Garraiblagh* by Jenny Methvyn, and *Limelight and Shadows* by Tony Brady. We also have two works by debut authors: Jean McQuade's poem *The Longest Day of the Year*, written about the closure of Magheralough Primary School, and *Valentines*, a flash fiction by Deirdre Harvey of Ballinamore Writers Group.

Jenny Brien

Editor