



## What is Common Ground?

*Once synonymous with the NI countryside, we only have one breeding pair of corncrakes left. Help shape an agricultural policy that helps bring them back by taking action here:*

This is a call to petition, on Twitter, by [Nature Matters NI](#), that was tweeted just as I sat down to write for *Corncrake Magazine*.

Synchronicity or what?

*Translating Common Ground* was an event held here on the farm on 22 July. We were very happy to host the Fermanagh writers and to celebrate with them their 10th anniversary of creative activity. We were also honoured to host the paintings of Jeremy Henderson and to receive the illuminating talk by his widow Patricia Martinelli and also talks by Frankie McPhillips and Anja Rosler.

I spoke a little bit on the day about the important, catalytic role of art and artists at times of cultural and political change. *Common Ground N.I.* is part of an international movement that moves to change human being's relationship with the land where ever they live. We assert that this must be for the benefit of both humanity and nature.

Whilst working to change the cultural story we also acknowledge that there is a multiplicity of stories. Our role is less about forcing stories as we would with a crop of rhubarb or artichoke but more like harvesting stories that are emerging naturally, to catch their seed on the wind between the tree and the river or at the mouth of the badgers' set. There is an obvious human story here on the farm, the story of a family, of local community, of human history. This is an important way in for people. It is the stuff of the threshold – who is living/lived here? What have they been doing here? How long for?

The purpose of the stories about growing up on a farm near Tempo, as told by Frankie on the day, is less about nostalgia and more about remembering how it could be. This would not be a return to the past but rather a reintegration of those aspects useful in stepping forward into a new world.

Then there is the narrative of the ecologist and naturalist as translated by Anja – the story of a plant such as Yellow Rattle – of how it lives with the other plants here – all of them kin. This is how we might support their

community and find our rightful place within it.

There is a huge ecology of possible stories: the cultural memory of meadows, of haymaking, of the interweaving of human culture with plants and soil through song and dance, the significance of fairy tree and druids' stone. Further out we enter the universal story of hill and tree and river, of sky and earth. These stories interact at the edge of overlapping fractal patterns – a boy who grows up on a farm, learns the art of fly fishing for trout from his father, dreams teenage dreams of trout surviving in the same river in a post-nuclear war landscape and not again until mid-life when after dreaming many trout dreams he returns to the home place to be told for the first time that the name of the place *Tattenabuddagh* means *The place of the very large trout*.

We live in interesting times to be sure – interesting and challenging. We need to slow down and reconnect with nature, but there is also urgency. Time is running out for the corncrake, for the salmon, the trout and numerous other species – including humanity. There is much work to be done to avert catastrophe.

The work of the writer of prose or poetry is partly to raise the alarm, throbbing like the wren in the bush, to make a lot of noise even for a small bird. We can access aspects of ourselves that are beyond that which is weary, cynical, burnt out with the news. We can make sacred again the place and all its inhabitants, and re-inspire a sense of wonder.

It has been said many times that our cultural crisis is a crisis of spirit. At the heart of this crisis is the loss of meaningful connection. We have to rediscover our selves as wild, to enter into the fecund freedom of the imaginal wilderness. We need work that helps us through the darkening times ahead. Jeremy Henderson's painting has this quality – there are landscapes that seem broody, ominous and yet shining within them are silver hemmed clouds and spiralling light reflected in water. We need work that faces the imminent dark yet also guides us to new possibilities.

Whether utopian or dystopian, the work cannot be prescribed by the purely rational, it can only be scribed and scribbled from the wild land to the writing pad through a body with open eyes, ears, and heart. It happens when the ego is dissolved and everyday habitual responses are replaced by something more generative and courageous. In this dissolution the unexpected story emerges, the synchronous happens and the dreamer realizes she is being dreamt, the writer that he is being written with.

So the invitation stands; come again to Common Ground to be informed by the place by its nature its fields, trees, and river – to catch the whispers on the wind and translate them into the new story for the folk who live in Fermanagh and beyond. We need this if the corncrake and ourselves are not to become extinct and possibly mythical creatures in the imaginal realm, accessed by sentient creatures not yet evolved.

**Robbie Breadon**