



## [Pig Shop: Simon Fennessy Corcoran](#)

This week sees the opening of a new exhibition in the higher bridges art gallery, [Pig Shop: a collection of new works by artist Simon Fennessy Corcoran](#). *Pig Shop* invites conversation on the concept of value bestowed upon different raw materials in our economy, lifestyles and art.

A Limerick native, Corcoran reaches deep into the rich history of his home, to its origins as a central hub of the pig farming industry in the early 1900's. These works remind us of a time gone by, an almost forgotten way of life, and shows it to us through symbols of the pig farming industry juxtaposed with symbols of the world that has replaced it over time. Rich, gaudy metal and mineral displayed alongside and even fused with pig bone fragments. The project originated with Simon's own keen interest in both the concept of value and anatomy.

Whilst most of the display consists of original material a small number of borrowed pieces open the tour of works in order to set the scene. Historical documents- photography and newspaper clippings develop a great sense of the origins of the work and show us a window into a bygone Limerick.

The main works running along the gallery's perimeter show us a mixture of anatomical parts and precious materials, both individually and layered on one another, with crystallised pigs toes and gold layered pig skulls on display. The back wall houses a step-like series of miniature collections deconstructing the main themes, with tiny jars of gold leaf flake and the broken down bones of a full pig's trotter. The centrepiece demands attention, with its display of full pig skulls each layered in a different precious material. Ranging from chrome bronze leaf to gold resin and cobalt crystals the display is set to the backdrop of a huge and garish gold film curtain highlighting the modern obsession with gold.

Whilst the main attraction is most visually prominent, it is some of the less visually striking works that seem to hold more weight, like the half skull topped with a crystal mould encased in glass. Presenting the idea that it is somehow more valuable than the other works simply due to its enclosure, it raises questions about the relative value of our art as much as our economy.

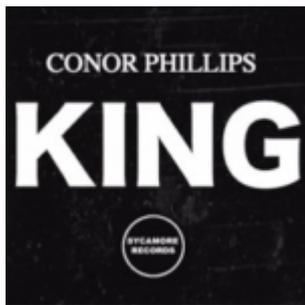
Simon's work certainly brings 'meta' to the fore with multiple messages and themes hidden throughout; perfect for those wishing to really get their teeth into the meaning behind it all, like the bone fragments on a limestone slab,

one of Limerick's foundations atop another. That said, it may not be for the faint of heart.

There is a surprising sense of beauty in the work considering the combination of gaudy and sometimes grotesque material, with some of the displays seeming like they've come straight from a macabre Michelin star restaurant. A display well worth checking out, *Pig Shop* will be in the [Higher Bridges Art Gallery](#) from June 3<sup>rd</sup>– July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Caiman O'Shea**

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## [New Releases from Conor Phillips](#)

Local singer/songwriter Conor Phillips has gone from strength to strength in the last few years, attracting a strong following with his unique musical style. Learning to run almost as soon as he could walk, Conor began songwriting the moment he first picked up a guitar around four years ago.

Starting out as a bedroom player, Conor ventured into busking and open mics around Enniskillen and Belfast, where he was quickly noticed for his sound and invited to play some headline shows of his own. After a successful gig at Enniskillen's Roadstock all-day music event he was approached by Joel Johnston of Sycamore Records, who had heard his songs and was keen to record them.

Together they recorded Conor's first five-track E.P. *Foolhardy Boy*, which was released a year and a half ago to a great critical reception. After gigging and promoting the E.P. for over a year Conor is now back in the studio with Sycamore Records and ready to bring us a new E.P., which will be released later this summer. A sample of two tracks has been released as a teaser for the forthcoming E.P., the title track *King* and its B-side *People*. Recorded mixed and mastered by Joel Johnston, the duo also produced a live video version of the song, with backing music provided by Joel's brother Jamie Johnston. In a very short space of time the live video has accrued over 5,000 views and the audio track over 1,500 listens. Both are available to stream from the Sycamore Records' [Facebook](#) and [Soundcloud](#) pages.

King was recently chosen as track of the day by music page [Sway and Breathe](#).

With a unique and memorable voice and a writing talent to match, Conor's songs have a way of burrowing into the mind, with lyrical hooks that you are sure to be left humming after a show.

If you enjoy the recordings you can find Conor playing live on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> June in Charlie's bar, Enniskillen from 9pm.

**Caimin O'Shea**

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## Ulster: My Search for its Spirit of Place

*Inspector Celcius Daly stared through the windscreen at the border landscape. The round hills loomed, black and foreboding. The remnants of a British army watchtower were still visible, a shard on the horizon. Daly wondered would he ever lose that prickle of anticipation that signalled he was about to enter disputed territory.*

*He rolled down the window and listened to the sound of birdcalls and flowing water, trees and boggy fields suffused with a sense of peace. He would have got out for a walk, but a sudden rainstorm kept him confined to the car. The horizon darkened as the rain drummed the roof, the windscreen wriggling with the distorted shapes of trees. The horizon changed again as the sun broke through.*

*A strange feeling preoccupied Daly. He sat in silence. He did not know what had overcome him, but he felt as though the landscape still held secrets. What was it about the little road, dwindling through bogland and forest, now brightly shimmering in the aftermath of the downpour that felt so alien? As though when the rain had stopped he had somehow crossed an invisible border, and was already in the country he had booked a flight for. He felt far away from everything. This was the true foreign country, he realised. Not the country on the other side of the border, nor the one he was due to fly to, but this landscape that was his own, so familiar from his childhood, but made strange by the hundreds of reconciliations, the countless little acts of truth-telling, the search for disappeared bodies like Mary O'Sullivan's, the unravelling of cover-ups and secret betrayals.*

*This was the foreign country that he and his fellow citizens were coming to after a long journey, to rebuild lives darkened by the Troubles. The notion*

*gave him a strange lift. That he and his neighbours might finally find refuge here, like asylum seekers in the landscape they had always carried inside themselves.*

*From **TRESPASS**, due to be published by Head of Zeus in November 2016.*

Although I write contemporary crime fiction with heavy shades of noir, my books are motivated by a quest to understand the spirit of place in post-Troubles Northern Ireland. Sometimes the most unexplored landscape – as deserving of attention as any far flung destination – is the terrain closest to home. I wanted to take on the landscape I had grown up in and loved, and do justice to its beauty. I also wanted to pay tribute to the spirit of the people who inhabited it, and who underwent an extraordinary situation during the Troubles.

Being Irish, landscape for me is much more than geography. It's a part of my collective identity. It's also a window into the soul of a country and its troubled history. From the outset, I wanted to create a landscape that would communicate the emotional action of the plot and the looming sense of threat. I also wanted it to be recognisably Irish. I take a guilty pleasure in drawing the reader's attention to the strangeness of the Tyrone landscape, making them shudder at a gruesome-looking blackthorn tree, a rotting cottage, or a treacherous bog. I wanted readers to feel the dark gravity of the border countryside, its interlocking parishes of grief, its mesh of twisting roads, the sense that out there amid the blackthorn thickets and swirling mists, loose bits of the past are still wriggling their way through the shadows.

The Northern Irish landscape I know and love has its own geography of moods, an interweave of darkness and light, which I find constantly mesmerizing. I'm not sure if my descriptions bear any resemblance to what is actually out there, or if anyone else notices what I see. Perhaps they are more a reflection of a region of my mind. The settings always come first for me, shaping the characters and plots. At heart, I'm a thwarted poet and my muse is Tyrone – its gurgling bogs, its frozen thickets of thorn trees, its mists swirling in from Lough Neagh.

Since childhood, I've always wondered what makes the Ulster landscape so mood-enhancing and mystical. For a start it must be one of the most fickle landscapes on these islands because its terrain and weather change so often. How often do you find yourself out walking or driving and in the blink of an eye, you see an old view in a new way, and your thinking and mood changes, or is enhanced dramatically. It's as if you've crossed an imaginary border, the point at which rain or mist begins, or the wind suddenly picks up, and animates the trees, or the sun breaks through the evening sky and bathes everything in light. This is the point at which you feel bewitched, or – as Patrick Kavanagh would have said – you've entered fairyland, another more mysterious country within the familiar folds of the fields you've always known. The magical or mystical thing about it is that those moments are unbiddable. They are epiphanies that come unannounced and give you an emotional connection with the landscape. I've tried to capture these 'border moments' within *Border Angels* and *Disappeared*, as well as the sequel *Silence*, which was published in November. This is why my detective character, Celcius

Daly, keeps getting lost in the landscape he's known all his life.

I was especially drawn to Lough Neagh. It's the largest freshwater lake in Western Europe, but it must be one of the most unappreciated vistas on these islands, a void in the interior of Northern Ireland. Its water level sank about fifty years ago, removing it from the view of local roads and vantage points, so that might be one of the reasons for its hidden nature. In winter, it's often shrouded in fog, adding to its air of being withdrawn into itself.

It felt like a place accessible only to the imagination, and I thought it might be a useful metaphor for the hidden stories of the Troubles, the amnesia that has been operating in the midst of life here after the Troubles, the void at the heart of the peace process, the plight of victims and their quest for justice, the unsolved murders that have been quietly removed from view.

A lot of Irish crime fiction seems to be based on the belief that the genre functions best in an urban setting. However, the rural landscape I'm trying to describe is as richly textured as any cityscape. The border backdrop of my books is not a vast and unpopulated wilderness. It's a landscape compacted out of the generations that went before, and full of their mysterious presence; a claustrophobic stage into which too many competing tribes have been crammed, where the past lies cheek by jowl with the present, and where every thorn tree or rock has its own ghost, its own dreadful story to tell.

*As well as the best-selling series of crime novels featuring Inspector Daly, [Anthony J Quinn](#) has published two historical novels *The Blood-Dimmed Tide* and *Blind Arrows* set in early 20th Century Ireland.*

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## [The Mind's Eye Sees Red](#)

I was paid a visit today by a bird-woman:  
a *Coccinella magnifica* flew into my head  
and, instead of bouncing off and flying on,  
she alighted, stayed; folded in her real wings.

I smiled and was delighted  
when, on reflection, I felt her waiting;  
her paired elytra glistening,  
perfectly centred on my brow  
as a red, black-dotted bindi.

With glee, the mind's eye said:  
*Imagine me a world – as Lennon did.*  
*Choose carefully your Lennon;*

*there's more than one beetle to be  
spotted in heaven, and earth, or sea.*

I guess – if my hearing was poor  
or my spelling unsure  
I could easily have ended up bitter:  
biting on a citrus fruit; or kneeling  
beside him and his Marx – red-faced  
all set to go – waiting for the starter's gun  
on my marks; but . . . no matter.

*Paint the country flat, said the mind's eye:  
the common foetal eye of a nation –  
natural before it is born;*

and so, I paint it side-on as a dream-line  
bleeding on the lowest edge extreme  
of my canvas; above it only sky

where gold bars weigh light . . .  
as a feather on finches' wings,  
gently buffeted, burnished;  
all a flutter in a wind of seed, as they dust  
sub-atomic glitter onto teasel, dandelion,  
thistle-crown; and I am down  
downwind of it all – weighting, weighing;

contemplating the alchemy of these gifts  
as they parachute sideways into the dull cold  
bars barring the open window to my dark cell;  
into the hardened pig-iron steel  
to soften it . . . to soften it

to soften the un-taped silence . . .  
that's what I can't hear any more  
as I hear my own voice return – boomerang,  
come at me; words spilling out  
of my head, my mouth – leaving my lips  
then back into my own (captive) ears.

I too am captivated (for a short while)  
until I hear myself getting in the way  
of it all as my slowed-down thoughts  
get muddled in the repeating double-take

of what I have just said, relayed through the  
headphones; thoughts slowing with every echo  
of what I said, then heard then said  
again and again in the double, double-take:  
the getting in the way refrain: the reflection  
of daydreams creating refraction, distraction,  
dislocation from the comforting fake of the 'here

and now' of me; as past, present and pluperfect

concur once more, once more . . . once more  
once more within this constant bore  
within this monotone looping of *musak*  
or the monstrous drone of complicit computers

or the – only black,  
or the – only white of the button-pressers,

the pen-pushers,  
the bean-counters,  
the form-tickers –  
the form-makers:

the fuckers that roll out miles and miles of red tape  
with the sickly smiles that the lickens of gummed  
stamps have; their coated tongues raw – bleeding  
like flayed tapeworms ingested into the furred-up cycle  
of forever-overlapping roles; rolling out more  
and more red-taped carpet for the Gala-Nights  
of tuxedoed farmers as they queue up frozen  
as welly-booted penguins: good men, flightless birds  
out of water, standing still for their hand-outs –  
awaiting pats on their backs as lambs to the slaughter:  
men forced to diversify, intensify,  
to go against the grain – forced to spill their guts  
on their own precious family land, to make more rivers  
of liver-fluked blood for *them* to wade through; springing  
more and more floods of bloody tape to enable *them*  
to infect all our sluggish livers, or to clog-up already  
gasping lungs in the yellow bile and red bureaucratic  
phlegm, of the takers and the fakers who rust and blunt  
the very scalpels (and the knives)  
of able and keen surgeons and healthcare givers;  
who – because of *them*,

can't cut through it all to even save lives.

**John D Kelly** is a poet and architect living, writing and working in  
Fermanagh, winner of the Hungry Hill – 'Poets Meet Painters' Competition  
2014

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## Art that Lingers Long in the Mind

If there is a *leitmotif* running through contemporary art it is one of questioning, and in particular there is the omnipresent – *What is it trying to say?* When I look upon Alex Colville's seminal painting of *Horse and Train* (1954), it makes me want tell a story. It makes me want to tell more than one, in fact. I do not pretend to know what Colville intended with the painting, but that for me is the quintessential character of the work.

The stories that this painting tells are allegorical. One would find it hard to construct a feasible scenario where a stallion may seek to tackle a steam train head-on. Note the landscape depicted in the painting, it is barren and flat and in surreal hues, set with foreboding grey skies. Although there are vast plains in Colville's Canadian homeland, this landscape is a surreal representation. It would be familiar to his audience and yet alien and perhaps apocalyptic. Also the perspective is somewhat unusual in that it presents the muscular posterior of the black stallion in the forefront and diminishes the more powerful steam locomotive into the distance.

The depiction of the diminishing railway track also significantly foreshortens the perspective, making the two characters in the play appear far closer than they actually are. This adds a tension in that a disaster appears imminent and gives the viewer an intimate and perhaps uncomfortable front-row seat.

It could be a representation of an inter-generational relationship, perhaps a father and a son in crisis, as the two seem hell-bent on going head to head – the older man, stubborn and headstrong, defying the rational convention against the blind, unthinking and unfeeling armour-plated determination of the young buck, ploughing on without consideration. It could be telling the story of a farm and the need to adapt to the changes brought about by emerging technology and consumer demand in the wider society. Another story takes in the wider context of the 1950's, where the world and its peoples emerged shattered and broken after the second world war, technology bringing unheralded change to how we live and ultimately how we are as people. The old certainties of the past being challenged by radical new thought, with little time taken, or so it seemed, for reflection and due consideration; those were worrisome times.

I believe that the stories implicit in the work have important lessons for today. We are once again going through times of great uncertainty,

technological and societal changes conjugate once more to unsettle and unnerve, the questions that arose when Colville first produced the work are with us again.

*John Llewellyn James is a poet and a member of Fermanagh Writers*

*Horse and Train* is exhibited at the [Art Gallery of Hamilton](#) Ontario, Canada.

Image from the [official site](#) of Alex Colville

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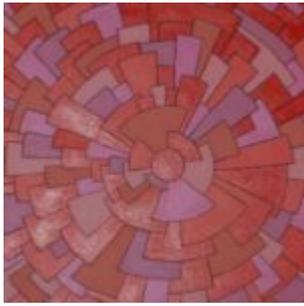
## [Rossorry Churchyard](#)

When my world becomes too fast and hard  
And my head is full of thoughts I do not need  
I take myself away to a country churchyard,  
To find the peace, I plead.

Beside a cut-stone church  
An ancient yew tree stands.  
One made by man, for God;  
The other made by God, for man –  
Yet both a credit to their mason's hand.  
Some find you there between the walls, where they repent.  
I find you here, where the chestnut falls,  
With those long past lament.  
Among the headstones, new and old,  
I rest against the one whose name time stole.  
And in the stillness of this place,  
I close my eyes, to see and be  
In your benevolent grace.

*Peter Byrne, now living in Liverpool, was a founder member of Fermanagh Writers and the [originator of Corncrake](#).*

*Image by **Kate O'Shea***



## Poetry and Blindness

This is not something I write about often, but blindness does affect my experience of poetry, both how I write and how I read the work of other poets.

As a writer I actually find other people's disabilities and struggles far more interesting to write about, perhaps because with a background studying chemistry, I relish the task of finding out the nitty-gritty behind-the-scenes mechanics of different diseases. I am the first person to say that no two people experience disabilities the same way, and the things that I find affecting my writing as a blind poet are things that other blind poets find no trouble at all, and things I find easy and manageable might cause somebody else a lot of stress.

Talking of blind poets, I asked my friend Google to tell me all about the contemporary blind poets it knew about. When I say 'contemporary' I tend to assume that they will preferably be still living. Google helpfully responded with two answers – Homer and Milton. A little more rummaging round revealed a few very much alive poets, but only five have emerged so far, some from books I've bought and others from poetry friends who know them. Within the umbrella of blindness I include any significant visual impairment that affects how a poet "sees" the world or interacts with it.

My barriers start with how I'm going to read a book. Amazon's Kindle has varying levels of accessibility, from none to not very much. I use a computer screen reader, which reads out any text such as emails, Word documents, Facebook posts, Twitter Tweets and so on. Some publishers do produce PDF eBook versions of their poetry books and that is my preferred medium. My screen reader (I use the free Open Source program NVDA) can read from top to bottom of a page, or line by line, word by word and character by character, depending on what you are focusing on when you are reading.

Have your writing tutors, colleagues and mentors urged you to read your work aloud? Mine have. I'm a blind guy with a lousy memory! I don't find it easy to write or edit on the hoof, leaving me tied to the laptop (notebooks and pens are not a lot of help in the blind world). As I finish typing each word the screen reader reads it out so I can hear if I've mistyped something. So the one voice I hear reading my poems, 99 percent of the time, is my screen reader. Think of Stephen Hawking reading your poems for you ... I admire

Stephen Hawking tremendously on all counts, but I think his electronic voice would drive me nuts before long! The voices on my screen reader are quite a lot more human sounding, with responsive male and female voices to choose from. Most of my electronic devices talk to me, but the one thing I have yet to find is a talking dictionary/thesaurus.

Do you often find yourself writing about things that you have caught out of the corner of your eye? I used to. The biggest concern I have now that I am a blind poet is that the things I become aware of are generally things that somebody else has already seen – maybe a friend has spotted something they think I'd like to be told about, or maybe it is something that a local or national newspaper has decided merits attention. For me that is why I continue to read books from all genres of writing, and why I pay close attention to the developments in technology and science, particularly the things I am not going to visually see for myself.

In 2014 the Welsh organisation [Disability Arts Cymru](#) held a competition for disabled artists; in 2015 they held a competition for poems inspired by the artworks. Other health reasons prevented me from entering that competition, but I have since written poems inspired by the titles of two of the artworks – *Blue Ballet Slippers* by [Rosie Moriarty-Simmonds](#) became my poem *Tomorrow's Dancers* and *Study in Red* by [Lucy Chaplin](#) became my poem of the same name, which relates my history of diabetes and blindness and kidney failure.

### ***Study in Red***

*After the painting 'Study in Red' by profoundly deaf painter Lucy Chaplin*

*(image detail courtesy of [Disability Arts Cymru](#)).*

I dress in scarlet  
daring  
don't walk on me like Axminster  
hallway carpets.

Smile at me at night  
dear shepherd.

Circulating and mingling  
into every corner  
cut me and I bleed.

Stab me and I know  
four times daily  
how many millimoles<sup>1</sup>  
are blindly running  
through my veins  
before tapping their way  
out through the replacement kidney.

I blush  
ashamed of a lack of resolve

that wouldn't let go  
of the red velvet cake.  
though I had long ago seen  
the shepherd's warning.

1 *Blood sugar levels, measured from daily finger prick blood tests, are measured in units of millimoles per litre. The hormone insulin keeps a blood sugar level in the range 4.0 to 8.0, with levels increasing after the consumption of sugary foods, and decreasing with exercise.*

**Giles L. Turnbull** is a blind poet living in South Wales. With a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry, and a career that has included national and local Government policy and transportation planning, and a love of music that includes playing the piano and trumpet, he finds every angle of life to be fascinating and beautiful, finding a home for it in his poetry.

Profoundly deaf artist **Lucy Chaplin's** degree focused on woods, metals, and plastics product designs. Lucy said, "There are no barriers with visual art, in comparison to the real world with communication barriers which make it very hard for a deaf individual in a hearing world. It is so easy to express emotions and moods on a canvas through colour, accuracy, shapes and lines. it gives me a sense of freedom."



## [Life as an Artist](#)

People often ask me how did you get started in art. Well it was pretty simple. About six years ago a friend told me he had an appointment with a gallery to show his art to a curator, so I asked if I might paint something and go along with him. He said OK. I painted that night for the first time. We arrived at the gallery, myself with one canvas, my friend with six. The curator laid them against the wall, picked up mine – laid it against another wall and studied it for about twenty minutes. He sat on the floor, so I sat beside him.

My first painting that day sold for a thousand euros. So the journey began, and it's taken me all around Ireland, teaching other people how to do it When your eyes first encounter that blank white canvas it can be daunting, but

smile; therein lies a great mystery of life and art to your life that's dead simple to explain. Here goes – some handy tips to maybe get you started.

I knew nothing about art, so the first point I want to make is you don't have to know anything about art to begin with. Down through the last few years giving classes I would say to people who didn't even try to paint – let your heart dictate to the canvas. Yes, blend a load of colour and see what arrives. Don't restrict yourself by saying I can't paint – just hit the canvas and keep going.



The Tall Ships



Clouds on the Water



A Study in Light



Ballet Night

Use Vaseline to keep your hands supple and after painting it's easy to remove the paint. Some people like to use gloves but I find it restricts the movement in my hands. A couple of days before I begin a canvas I use tea and white spirits to clean my brushes thoroughly. On some canvases I use a wash of white spirits and beer. I find it gives a nice gleam to the surface with

some linseed oil.

I like landscapes and abstracts. If you're into abstract art, remember – people buy more for colour rather than content. They see colour and think of the walls in their sitting rooms and halls and I bet they will like your colour so don't worry too much about content; the best thing is just hit the canvas. Don't try to paint, but let the brushes just roll on the canvas. Don't worry about copying someone else. A lot of people like Monet's paintings but if you study the master's works, JW Turner's style is much the same. As Monet was living in London I would say its a good bet he copied Turner.

OK, I hope you enjoy reading this. Have fun, and see where it goes.

*Zeus Cooney is a self-taught artist based in Dublin*

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## [John Fox \(Ballinamore\)](#)

The Shannon Erne Writers Group had our book *First Cut* launched by John McGahern in the Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon. When Brian Leydon introduced me, the writer asked, *Where do you live?*

*A few doors up From Pat Mac's garage in Ballinamore* I said. (Pat Mac was his uncle.)

He quizzed me about John Fox, the present owner and sole apprentice to the late Pat.

*He still buys bread in Dinkins, Belturbet, his favourite bakery.*

He smiled. I breathed, a nervous novice in the literary world.



John Fox outside his garage, painted by Padraic O'Reilly, Acrylic on Paper, Exhibited in Solas Art Gallery, Ballinamore 2009.

***John Fox (Ballinamore)***

Sometimes he works  
at a wooden table in the office,  
angled like an ancient school desk.  
The indentation of his hand  
smooth as an old leather glove.

Under a low sagging roof  
he sticks papers on spindle  
then shuffles around tyres,  
past gas tanks, bales of briquettes  
and bags of kindling.

Out at the pumps,  
all weathers, all hours.  
Leitrim people queue  
for petrol, diesel and extra fills  
in plastic drums.

A man from America  
photographs him.  
John complains he doesn't  
give him time to comb his hair.

A portrait is painted.  
He shakes his head,  
*It sold for big money*  
*I don't know why.*

Nor does he understand why  
the McGahern summer school  
comes by bus to view the garage  
and meet him.

He walks back to the office  
where tools hang askew,  
spider webs in the corners,  
gossamer memorials  
of time gone before.

**Angela McCabe** is the winner of the 2016 Listowel Poetry Collection. Her second book comes out this year.

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## [How to Run a Shebeen](#)

There comes a time in every man's life when he puts his empty glass down on the counter, looks around for someone to serve him and finally in despair mutters to himself, "I could run a better pub than this lot."

Most people are happy to leave it at that but not my father. He had owned one pub and managed another and he just couldn't let the opportunity of one last boozier pass him by. Nowadays we'd call it a retirement project; some men dream of long afternoons on the golf course or taking a cruise round the Med, but not Dad. He just couldn't stop working till working stopped him.

My father had inherited a country shop and saw the opportunity to put his life skills as a farmer, publican and armchair philosopher to good use. He would transform from grocer to spirit-grocer, but without any of the tedious legal formalities.

A word on the law; there are a few benighted individuals out there who delight in setting the police on an honest businessman. It is likely that one day a cop will call at your door. If he's just an average cop he will say "we've had reports" and give you a stern look, but if he's a clever cop he'll wait until a sunny day and arrive in his shirtsleeves and announce, "Is there e'er the chance of a bottle of beer? The drouth is choking me." The answer is

always no. I can't be clearer about this; a firm but polite "No" will save you a world of trouble and your name in the papers.

I will always remember the day two young Guards called to our shop, put their caps on the counter and calmly appraised the rows of empty grey beer crates my old dad had stacked high against the wall. One of them ordered a Cavan Cola – which was suspicious in itself, while the other asked my father if he had anything stronger. My poor dad looked up at them with his cornflower blue eyes and Sellotaped glasses, and intoned in a mixture of sadness and shock, "We don't sell any of that stuff here." We never heard from them again.

The whiskey should always be a premium whiskey. A second-rate whiskey decanted into an empty premium bottle is acceptable in the cities, but don't try it with any countryman over the age of twenty. You do not sell brandy. No vodka. Nothing blue or orange or green. No ice. Tins of beer may seem like a good idea but need to be kept cold, and anyway the older drinker prefers a bottle; it's just the right size. Your local licensed premises isn't your competition, it's your wholesaler. They will be only too glad to sell you a few extra crates of beer and a few bottles of whiskey on a regular basis.

There should be no jukeboxes, no pool tables, no optics and no high stools. No peanuts or dartboards. There should be no happy hours or anything else that comes between a hard-working man and a quiet drink. Remember, this is your home, but it's where your customers get to socialize and tell lies and recall the exciting moments of their lives. So, as it's partly their home, make sure it is always clean and warm. An open fire is preferable to central heating in a shebeen no matter what people say. A turf fire is ideal, with coal added if the priest calls, because the priest is a blessing on any house he visits and anyway, some of them have been known to buy a drink. Having said that, keep a back-up gas heater for the worst of winter weather, when you are kept busy making hot whiskeys and Irish Coffees.

There is a lot to be said for Irish hospitality, but it cannot always be extended to young yahoos who do not yet know their limits or to the drunk driver; they must be firmly warned off. This is not a "public" house, it is your house and you must decide who enters under its roof. For my father the ideal customers were farmers and council workers (the men who breast feed the shovel and take a nice long nap in the cab of a big yellow lorry while the rain pours down outside). Best of all were the retired men who will buy a loaf and a litre of milk, and buy a half 'un and a bottle of stout as an afterthought. They tend to get up in the morning, so their custom is to be encouraged as they won't try to sit you out.

In many ways my dad's shebeen (he never liked the term) was a day care centre for the elderly bachelors and widowers of the surrounding townlands. Pension day was the busiest day of the week. The customers would start to arrive around eleven o'clock for a leisurely drink before lunch. Throughout the afternoon old codgers in long black overcoats and peaked caps would appear, and soon the kitchen would soon be full of pipe-smoke and heated conversation. All the while the old fellow presided from an armchair in the corner rarely raising his eyes from the crossword unless for the latest gossip or to voice his opinion on some current political impasse. The topics

of conversation were what you might expect when Border men of a certain vintage foregather: the winter of '63, the Gunner Brady, how to treat glanders, the right way to sharpen a scythe, as well as the dos and don'ts of smuggling and poteen-making, Kerr Pinks versus Arran Banners and the usual births, deaths and marriages of the parish.

There were a few old hands who could be relied on for a song or a recitation when they were sufficiently lubricated. A seasoned reciter in full flow could rattle the windows and scare the dog, taking his cap off at the most poignant moments for added effect. If the reciters played it for laughs, the singers expected total silence through the full sixteen verses of *The Chapel of Swanlinbar* complete with footnotes bemoaning the lack of fighting spirit in the men of a certain townland. The *craic* would continue until late afternoon when the party would break up and everyone headed home. The men on bicycles would glide off through the mizzle with their shopping bags swinging from the handlebars, heading for secluded cottages up long, lonely lanes.

Over time my dad's older customers died off and weren't replaced, and so the shebeen gradually wound down. Dad was winding down himself, but the shebeen had given him a second wind at the latter end of his life. I doubt he ever really made a profit on the venture; it hardly covered the cost of the old man's cigarettes (Player's Navy Cut, twenty a day and he smoked them like each one was the last he'd ever smoke) but he had a wealth of friends, and it's always a good feeling to get one over on the forces of law and order.

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