

DUBLIN

IN
THE
COMING
TIMES

Booklet 4

SHORT STORIES



Dublin in the Coming Times: How the project works

In his 1893 collection, 'The Rose', WB Yeats included the poem 'To Ireland in the Coming Times'. Borrowing its title, Dublin in the Coming Times is a free, citywide programme of creative writing in which Dubliners, young and old, can create their own stories and poems as they look to the future of their city as it goes through another phase of evolution and renewal.

To get the ball rolling Roddy Doyle invited some writers and artists to contribute short stories re-imagining the city. Their work, included here, is being published in 'The Irish Times' throughout 2016.

Free creative-writing workshops have been run over the course of the year for adults in a number of Dublin public libraries, Donaghmede Library, Rathmines Library, Ballyfermot Library, Pearse Street Library, Central Library and Raheny Library, with workshops running in Ballymun Library as part of the Bealtaine Festival. Other participating organisations include Fighting Words, Science Gallery, Little Museum of Dublin, Axis Ballymun, Croke Park, Marsh's Library and a number of workplaces around the city. A selection of the pieces created in these workshops is featured in this publication.

Operating in partnership with Dublin UNESCO City of Literature and Dublin City Libraries, the project is intended to enable Dublin's citizens to participate in illustrating a vision of the city as a place that, although it might change and adapt to new circumstance, will continue as a living, creative environment and a place for the storyteller and poet.

Seán Love

Executive Director, Fighting Words

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dublincityofliterature.ie dublincitypubliclibraries.ie fightingwords.ie

Dublin in the Coming Times is one of six projects being promoted by Dublin's Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development, a Dublin City University programme with the UN University;
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BOOKLET 4

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What are Books Without Readers, Readers Without Books?

By Sharon Hogan

*(Thoughts after visiting Marsh's Library
with Fighting Words, 2016)*

I'm sitting in the old part of Baldoyle library, surrounded by books and the smell of books. It's a distinctive smell, warm, deep, quiet. From the spines of books nestled near the windows, the wisdom of the world beckons: HISTORY, proclaimed in bold caps, and ATLAS OF THE MOON. Africa, America, Birds Britannica. Hidden Depths, Taming the Infinite. These titles call up the world and all its antics, quietly enclosed in hard covers and soft pages.

I take one book off the shelf, a heavy hardback about global warming called "The Last Chance for Change". The heft of the book is awkward, yet satisfying. This is heavy matter after all, with a portentous title, and it is somehow congruent that it takes two hands to carry it to the table. I turn back the front cover, flip the pages, feel the warp and weft as they bend, the breath and ploof as they fall and land.

Finally, the book falls open on a midnight-blue, two-page photograph, the words "Our Changing World", a white whisper in its corner. It is a vast image of the bright lights of Earth seen from space, constructed from satellite images, the outlines of a world map superimposed on jewel-like light-speckles. It's a dramatic image: fathomless black oceans implanted with midnight-blue land masses latticed minutely with cobwebs of white trails and light-clusters. I can't help myself, I brush my hand across the smooth surface of the two-page spread, caressing the pages, and caressing the earth and its oceans and land masses. The paper under my fingers is like cool velvet, and again, a fragrance of paper and print and deep, dark ink wafts into the air. I feel as if I will never forget this image and all that it implies about profundity and vulnerability and vastness and defiance, so completely is it filling my senses.

Smell, sound, sight, touch, imagination. The library shelves enclosing me, the traffic in the distance passing by the library: it feels as if I will never forget this moment.

That is what happens with books. Through the thoughts that they contain,

they transport their reader to the mind of the creator of the book, and then further transport the reader on whatever personal journey he or she is ready to make. And through their sheer, physical presence, they ground the reader, through all the senses, in the time and place of reading itself.

That's what great books are made for, to be secret treasure chests, sometimes hard to open, sometimes hard to navigate when opened, but once fully-entered, abundant with matter uniquely configured for each explorer who un-picks the locks.

When the book is finished and its covers are once more closed, the reader is returned to the moment and the place in which he or she is sat, but is subtly, profoundly changed because of the encounter and though nothing appears to have changed in the book itself, the secrets it reveals to the next reader (or even at the next reading) are something essentially different.

It's a mysterious process, a mysterious relationship, and a relationship it is. As with making love, we need to be physically present with each other, the reader and the read, for the full impact of the encounter to be felt. Take the physical artefact of the book out of our hands, and gone is the sensory impact and all its neuron-firing, connection-fusing, memory-building consequence. Scientists tell us that we remember more easily what we learn from a printed book than we do from an internet screen-flow, that just as digital drop-out happens in computer-coding, so data drop-out occurs more swiftly when the information is not registered and cross-referenced throughout the physical senses.

In a way, it's the same for the book. It needs to be held, touched, moved, caressed, bent, twisted, flipped through, tossed aside and picked up again, read and even annotated in, for it to fully realise its purpose. What is a book that no-one reads? Nothing but paper, board, and ink. It needs to absorb the smell of the skin of a reader and the feel of a reader's gaze, it needs to cast up the mind that has been distilled into it, to confront and engage with the mind of reader after reader, to test the limits of the thoughts it holds, to fulfil the purpose for which it was made.

Archbishop Narcissus Marsh opened the first Public Library in Ireland in 1701, "for public use, where all might have free access." He loved books and loved learning. So he sought, bought, donated and bequeathed an extraordinary collection of scholarly books which have been and are to this day, held, preserved and protected by the Library's keepers and caretakers, who execute their responsibilities with reverence and pride. For just two euro, any person, citizen or visitor, can go through the black wooden door behind St Patrick's Cathedral and up the stone stairs into the Library to walk among shelves close-stacked with Socrates and Aeschelus and Sterne and Gallileo: over 30,000 books, on philosophy, history, theology, witchcraft and science, mathematics and geography, theatre, poetry, and more. While some books may be requested by particular scholars or researchers for study within the Library itself, many of the books sit deep in their shelves with a metal bar across their row and a drooping rope between them

and their visitors. Most are stored away from sight. There is a gargantuan process currently underway of "capturing" the books, all 30,000 plus of them, digitally.

Of the books whose spines are visible on the shelves in the Library, many contain written annotations in their margins from centuries of readers, scribbled notes Archbishop Marsh himself made on the pages which reference and cross-reference other books in the collection; there are scrawled editorial expletives from *Jonathan Swift*; we know that *James Joyce*, *Bram Stoker* and *Dr Thornley Stoker*, *Bram's* surgeon brother, read at the wooden table that still sits in the centre of the Library; we know that in times gone by, readers of every discipline were locked in the Library's small cages to read and make notes through the night; love letters were hidden among pages embellished with erudite and not-so-erudite 18th, 19th and 20th century hand-written commentary.

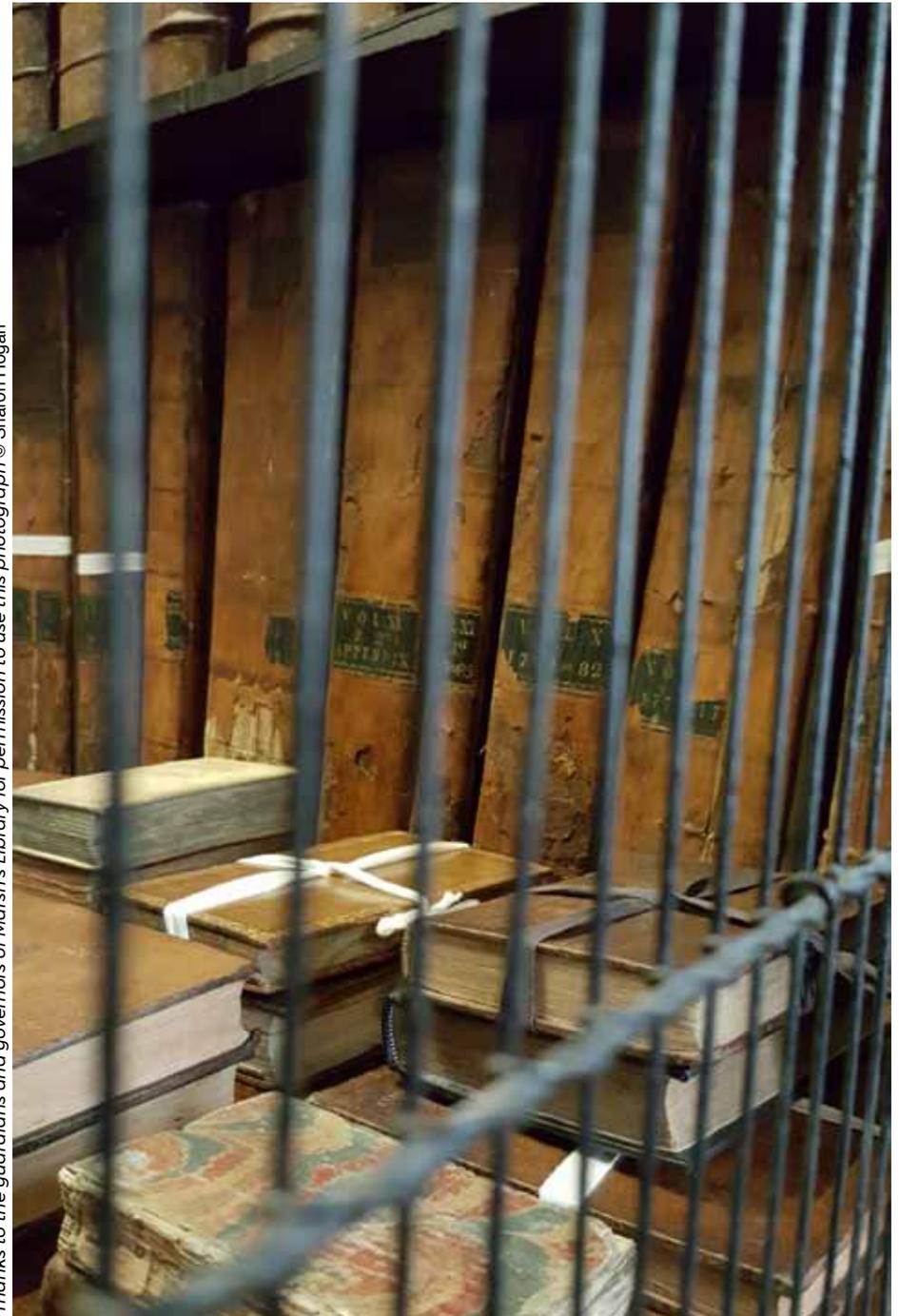
What a rich life these books have had! When I walk among the shelves inhaling the musty fragrance of old paper and time, sit on a wooden bench surrounded by rows of dark-skinned binding and old-gold lettering, or turn the wooden swivel chair from the calligraphy-practice desk to the readers' cages and the carved wooden Archbishop's mitres high above them, I can almost hear whispers of readers who exchanged their thoughts with the thoughts of the writers before them, readers who may have been among the first people to trust the printed word to carry truth. And it does sadden me that I cannot physically enter into that two-hundred year-long discourse. I cannot turn a page that two hundred years of readers turned, and cannot stow a question in a margin for two hundred years of future readers to run a finger over.

The books in Marsh's Library, in all their manifest vulnerability, have had to leave the conversation. They stimulated the senses of our ancestors for over two hundred years, and now they must rest or die. We are too sensuous for them, our heavy hands, even our warm breath, could cause them to perish completely. So, they sit silently in their bookcases, behind little iron bars, tended to by a small team of conservators and scholars, for us to gaze at from a distance.

I wonder, what is a book that is not being read? What becomes of all the beautiful, tactile, fragrant containers of thought when they can no longer serve the purpose for which they were made, when they cannot be opened, handled, entered into?

Sitting here in Baldoyle Library, the gleam of a black night-sky cool under my fingertips on the smooth pages open before me, the changing temperature in the room and drawing-in of darkness outside the window telling me it's time to go home, I wonder what will become of humans too, if this evocative, sensual relationship is overtaken by a virtual, digital one.

A book is a seafaring vessel that takes readers travelling via all senses into uncharted waters and returns readers to their chairs somehow altered. Will we make such rich and latticed journeys and store such rich and latticed memories when the imagination's vessel consists only of disappearing code on a back-lit computer screen? I wonder!



Thanks to the guardians and governors of Marsh's Library for permission to use this photograph © Sharon Hogan

Dublin in the Coming Times

By Geraldine Moroney

(Raheny Library Writers Group)

Electra searched the bank of electronic signs for her name as she emerged into the arrivals hall at Dublin's air and transporter hub. She was impressed with the advanced signage and accepted the technological message with her biometric ID (in this case the thumbprint of her left hand) and found herself being whisked to the city centre on a single person transporter.

The transporter glided to a stop at what appeared to be the fifteenth or sixteenth floor of a high rise building, just like the many others on the coastline. I should have a good view of the mountains, sea, and sky, she thought. Maybe she'd have the opportunity to explore before she met her former neighbourhood friend, Decker. She wondered about the forthcoming meeting with him. In his telepathic message he said he wanted her assistance to promote innovative ways of living, her area of expertise in New Zealand.

A door slid back and she found herself staring at two miniscule rooms. A bedroom with a closet-sized bathroom and another room that doubled as a living, dining, and kitchen area. The pods appeared to be made of some type of resin which she thought had been banned because of its emissions. If this is the innovative way of living, count her out, it is barely bigger than a shoebox, she thought. Well maybe that was an exaggeration. But it reminded her of the one and only time she'd visited Japan and stayed in the pod hotels that had once been popular there.

A sharp pain across her eye indicated there was an incoming telepathy message. "Decker, will you please upgrade your telepathy system, it gives me a dreadful pain over the left eye each time you want to communicate with me. Yours is just not compatible with mine." He agreed to forgo using it while she was in the city.

With that, a disembodied voice announced that her transporter was waiting to take her to Dublin.mark.2, the next and best version of Dublin city, located in the bay and with views stretching from the Mourne Mountains down to Dublin Bay and across to the Wicklow Hills. A very desirable view it further intoned, now available to the well behaved, well organised and well-ordered citizens of the

city, who wished to live there. In other words for the elite and wealthy, Electra thought. She was transported across the bay to structures similar to the one she was staying in, only each floor seemed larger and appeared to have outside space.

The transporter glided to a halt. An opening appeared in front of her and revealed a large plush dining room which was empty except for a lone figure at a bank of windows. He raised his hand in greeting and she realised this must be Decker. He passed off the empty dining room, with the excuse that the building was still in the early stages of development. While they were waiting on their order, he expounded on his theories and designs for his new way of living, many of which were in the experimental stages. He hoped to have it adopted by the city as a means of overcoming the city's continuing and future accommodation shortages.

Following a delicious meal, they were transported back across the bay to an older, less gentrified area of the city, a less desirable area to live at present, according to Decker. They stopped at one of the last surviving city dwellings from the mid- 20th Century. He said I've got these for a song, and as long as I house the remaining tenants, and I will, he assured her but it seemed as though he wanted to reassure himself.

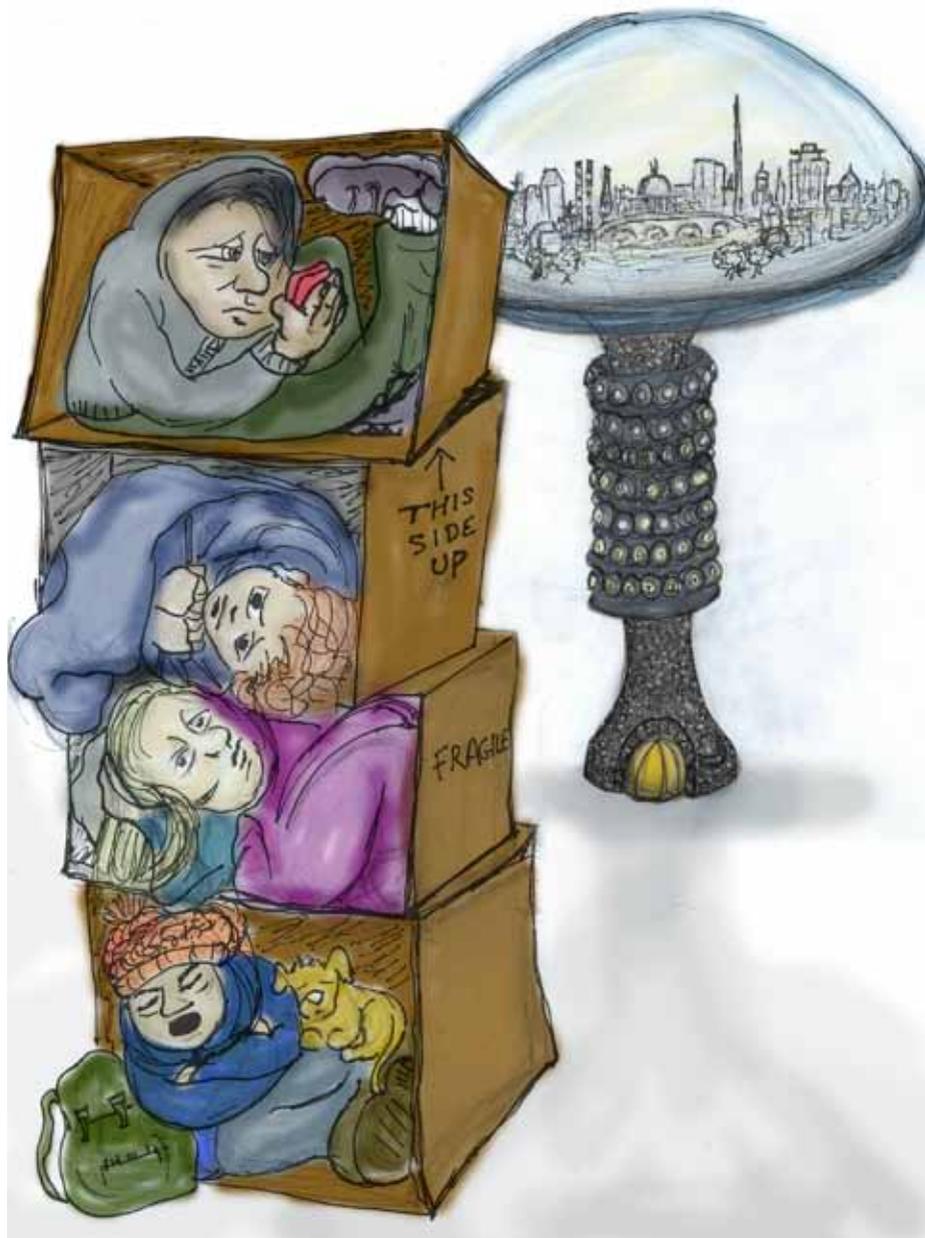
"Oh! Look!" she cried. "Prefabs!" She hadn't seen them in years, certainly none in New Zealand as it was as easy and as cheap to build and provide permanent accommodation as it was to erect these structures. Dublin didn't have the worry of earthquakes, one of the reasons it was a popular location with global organisations.

Again an opening appeared in the structure and they entered a space larger but not unlike her accommodation. She was offered refreshments, after which a screen descended, and the hard sell began. Decker's vision was outlined. Apparently he'd already built these resin structures in some of the city suburbs to house the homeless and wanted to go international with his concept and then global. He believed homelessness could be a thing of the past. Not only that, but other un-citizen-like behaviour could be curtailed. He went on to explain that most homeless people, on being offered somewhere permanent to live, were often so relieved to have clean, dry, safe accommodation that they agreed to many terms. "Security of Tenure and reasonable rents," suggested Electra.

"Well I suppose, yes," he responded, "but most agree to be model dwellers, and to get better accommodation, they worked for credits. Credits for more space, or their own kitchens or bathrooms." She was aghast to learn that the people being offered this accommodation didn't have their own bathrooms or kitchens. "But they do," he insisted, "if they work towards them, they work to build up their credits."

"You'll never get that past the city governors," she finally added.

"But I already have." He explained, that, following the housing crisis of the mid 2010's, coupled with the fallout after Brexit and the influx of returning immigrants from the former US, there was enormous pressure on the city's governors to



provide accommodation. He'd been to Japan and seen the hotel pods, adopted the idea and, with some investment, he built his first pods and expanded his concept to include behaviour modification. Which happily coincided with a backlash against the anti-authority groups of the late noughties. He liked to think he was involved with the return to an earlier more stable centrist political government, he added.

Electra wondered how she could escape from this nightmare, but Decker stared intently at her awaiting her response. She laughed nervously and asked what he needed her for, since he seemed to have every angle covered.

"To help me build my global dream, first we'll go international and then global."

She was tempted to ask if he was mad. Instead she inquired as to what had happened to the homeless in the rest of the country.

"I'm not bothered with them in fact I think if we can get the politicians to agree to it, then legislate for it, we could build the first Democratic Republic of Dublin. After all, the city extends from Louth in the North, to Gorey in the South, and Athlone in the midlands with over two thirds of the county's population living within the city limits."

Decker sat, but not for long. He said he liked the sound of that, A Democratic Republic of Dublin and he thought it was easily achievable by the year 2055, a couple of years away. He added that he thought that's what they should concentrate on, with Decker as the first president of the Democratic Republic of Dublin, and Electra at his side as its first lady. He believed they'd always worked well together.

Electra looked and was reminded of why she had taken a long break from him and his mad ideas. Only this time they were not mere ideas. He was mad, a megalomaniac. Time to get the hell out of here, she thought. He seemed to be making this up as he went along. She pleaded tiredness and, as an excuse to leave, told him of being overwhelmed by the breath of his ideas. She hoped to hell she'd be as far away from there as possible before he realised it. She reminded him that she was visiting distant relatives in the west of Ireland for a few days.

The following morning she realised he'd assigned a driver, Joey, to her as she travelled west. Joey grew restless after a few days of peace and tranquillity or else he missed the machinations of the madman he worked for and he returned to the city safe in the belief that she was catching up with friends and relatives.

Electra returned to the city immediately and contacted her former activist colleagues. Many would not even speak to her. She discovered why: they didn't trust her. They had seen Decker's marketing releases and his proposals for establishing a Democratic Republic of Dublin. She was pictured with him and his political allies.

"Time to get out of here," she thought. She decided it was safer to leave the city by ferry. As it moved beyond the city seawalls, she looked back and wondered about "Dublin in the Coming Times."

New Portobello Sonnets

By Harry Clifton

(Published in the Irish Times 16 April 2016)

Clouds, too, are incoming information.
 And I sit interrogating silence
 On Bloomfield Avenue, the soul on trial
 In the ever-changing light of contemplation.
 Somebody is muttering through the wall
 Of Number Twenty. Skyping, taking calls,
 Digiting, at intervals between,
 A million friends, on her little silver screen.
 The clouds are moving slowly. Green things grow
 On either side of the wall. Am I criminal,
 Indifferent, waiting for the other shoe
 To fall, as she quietens, finally,
 And the sky clears, and the human animal
 Caged in both of us, relaxes, yawns, feels free?
 Linoleum, yellow light – the House of Teas
 On Richmond Street. A woman, arm in sling,
 In conversation with a bearded friend
 On means and ends . . . Invisible, all-seeing,
 If the gods had any use for me
 But envy, I would die to tell her story.
 For I know that girl. Her beauty, her ideals
 Born after me, and doomed to die before me.
 Years will pass. It will grow unreal,
 The room they share above a halal butcher,
 Marx, Frantz Fanon and the people's future
 Dreamed, unrealised . . . I see it all –
 Linoleum, yellow light, the sex-appeal
 Of a broken arm, the politics of a fall.

 Belonging, as she did, to the era after the book
 And I to the era which, without the book,

Would be unliveable, what we had in common,
 This gorgeous blond-haired woman
 From Lithuania and I, was the mirror between us,
 Where the left hand and the right
 Were privy to each other, but only in God's sight,
 And our respective demeanours
 Gave away nothing, all those years
 Of high communion, silence, fallen hair
 They say she is in India now, or Mexico somewhere
 Seeking God. At the hour of her setting-forth
 Where was I? Breath on the mirror
 Clouds her face. A spirit has passed from the earth.

 Not for us high priesthood, Nat and I –
 A deaconate, maybe. Poems, minor orders
 In the broad church of creation. Every day
 On Camden Street, between murder
 And resurrection, naked among wolves,
 He walks his greyhound. Floodlit Harold's Cross
 His holy ground. And mine the local bars.
 Invisible the surplice of our selves
 We wear in secret. Wordlessly, we pass
 Into each others' lives, Nat Kenny and I
 On Camden Street. The catalogue of saints
 Includes us too, without the saintliness.
 Should we say hello? We would sooner die,
 Bound, as we are, by temporal constraints.
 I have it in mind, North African gentlemen,
 To write you into our own reality
 Such as it is. Would you sit there for me
 In the window, Al Houari Boumedienne,
 Mohammed Mebtouhe, Afshan Jilani,
 Eyes averted, women kept unseen,
 Unsaleables on shelfspace, nothing unclean
 In an empty freezer? The colour of money
 Means nothing to you, I know, or the death of God.
 Time is your real currency, gentlemen,
 Who fly your kites behind glass, and trap the sun
 In a yellow frontage. Put aside religion,
 Rites of slaughter. By your slightest nod
 Acknowledge me, eating here, in the Camden Kitchen.

Postcards

By Paddy Murray

(Raheny Library Writers Group)

I like collecting curios, I think it started when I noticed a garish suit in a charity shop window in Camden Street many years ago. It was probably worn by someone in a showband as this was about the time they were fading out. It was fluorescent green with all the trimmings but it was gone by the time I decided that I wanted it. Now I pick up anything like that if it's within my budget.

Some time ago I came across one of those gadgets that might have been part of the amusement arcades that once thrived in places like Bray in their heyday. It was a sort of tin man complete with turban, some lights and a slot for cards. I brought it home, it was small enough to fit in the boot of my car, and I left it in the garage. Of course, it was but one of a collection of curios, or junk, as my wife called them. Not long after, I began to notice a sort of power hum in the garage which seemed to be coming from my Tin Man.

This was a bit odd as it looked like something that had been lying unused for ages and I couldn't see how any power source would have survived. There was no other sign of life in this gadget, its row of lights didn't even flicker. Nevertheless I decided to try a card in the slot. I found a packet of postcard sized file cards which looked about the right size and popped them in. Now the lights came to life, and back came one of the cards with a date about a decade back and a question.

"How is the arcade going?"

"I'm afraid it's gone, though you seemed to have survived," I replied.

"Ah, such memories of the good times."

Now I was intrigued so I thought I'd see what memories were there. Seeing the year that was in it I chanced to ask if it knew anything of 1916, a hundred years ago. So I wrote that on another card.

"What was interesting about that year?"

"The Rising," I said.

"I don't know anything about such a thing but I can ask."

A day or so later a couple of replies arrived.

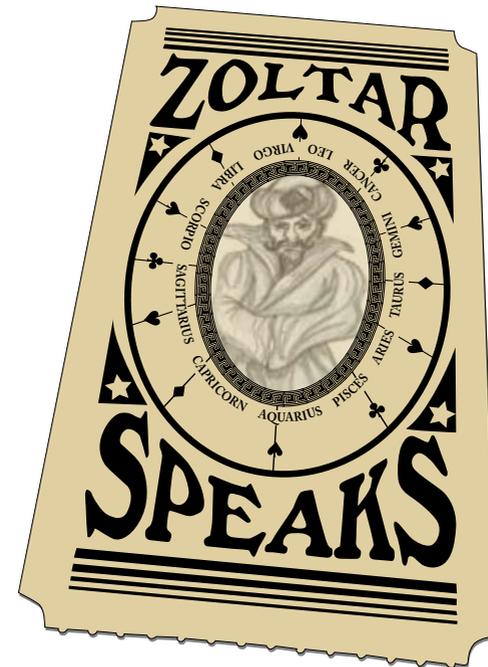
"We hope to see the dawn of a New Ireland, restoring its Glorious Past with its own language and heritage," said the first card.

"These fools are betraying our lads in France and deserve shooting," was the second reply.

This inspired me to get my daughter's help in drafting a ceist as Gaeilge to ask how the Breton Laws compared to Common Law.

"Infinitely better, we are bound by our laws, not by any wind that blows from either hand."

I could remember enough Latin to try a greeting to our early monks and got a beautiful illustrated script in reply. I then tried a question to the future, trying for 50 years as a start, 2066. I thought that after the usual time the lights seemed to flicker to herald a reply, but then nothing. Days passed with nothing coming back, and then I noticed that the sound of the power was beginning to fade. Eventually it died altogether. Perhaps I was imagining it, but the face of the Tin Man, so fixed and stoic, seemed to change to one of shock and incomprehension.



Sunrise Street

By Belinda McKeon

(Published in the Irish Times 16 April 2016)

“Dolphins!” Sof shouts, and she points, but I’ve missed them, or maybe they weren’t there in the first place; Sof always thinks she sees things out in the bay, this hour of the morning.

A couple of weeks ago, she convinced herself she could see a shark circling the Poolbeg chimneys. It’s true that I need to do my eyes again, and that’s not going to happen any time soon, because the machine is back in the house in Ringsend, but there are no sharks, there are no sharks (if I say it often enough, I’ll believe it), and I can live without seeing dolphins. All I want is the colour of the sky – this morning it’s a spectacular burst of blue and orange, and the clouds look stunned and scattered, and it’s clear the day is going to be another scorcher, but we’ll be underwater for the worst of it, so it’s alright.

“Drink your coffee,” I say, nudging her, or more like jolting her, because I’m nestled up against her. She always lets her coffee get cold. She can’t stop looking out there; she can’t get enough of the water and what it might hold. She’s even more into it this morning, unsurprisingly. I don’t know why we bothered stopping off at her dad’s cafe for the flasks. Neither one of us has taken a sip.

The bay is so huge and still and perfect. Some mornings it looks like it’s on fire, and that can make a strange sort of sense, with the tips of the tallest structures rising up out of it as though they’re still hurting, as though they’re still trying to escape – the Spire, the Exo tower, that old church on Thomas Street, where we used to love going to the markets – but this morning it’s almost white.

Plenty of people up here hate Dublin Bay now, they’ve built their houses facing away from it, without even a window out towards it in some cases; but we love it, Sof and I. We come up here at dawn as often as we can. We sit up against the piled rocks of Fairy Castle, and we lean into the warmth of each other, and we watch. This is our time, before people start to waken down on the slopes of Two Rock and over on Tibbradden, down in the pine forest and around Kelly’s Glen. Then it gets noisy around here, and busy, because everyone’s got a project at this stage; everyone’s building, or expanding, and until nightfall there’ll be the sound of chainsaws, of hammers, of people helping each other or hating each

other or whatever mixture of the two they’ve chosen to get through the day. Onduline Avenue, some smartarses have started to call the place, even though it’s nothing like an avenue, even though the huts and cabins are meandering all over the surrounding woods and mountains, wherever there was public ground, and in lots of cases wherever there was not. The farmers, the owners of that land, fought back for a while – some of them fought dirty – but at this stage, they seem to have given up. Or maybe they’re just biding their time. Anyway, the place is growing. There’s going to have to be another school pretty soon.

We live on Sunrise Street. That’s what Sof and I call it, anyway. Ours was the original street, the row of buildings that Mum and her group put up here early on, when the floods were just beginning; they knew what was coming. They knew these mountains, because they’d built the old walkway up here themselves, years ago, when the government wouldn’t stump up for it, and later, when the government panicked and pulled back all the money for the visitor facilities that’d already started to go up, saying that it was needed in the “coastal districts”, Mum and her group negotiated to get the abandoned site on a long lease, and she brought me and Dad up here, and the other people in the group, including Sof’s dad, brought their families. In the mornings, the first light spills on to the street between the houses, snaking up here to Fairy Castle and over to the ruined cairn on Tibbradden. It’s not a solstice thing – some days it does it, and some days it doesn’t, and anyway, the seasons are so screwed up now, who knows when the solstice is anymore? But it’s still cool.

“Come on,” Sof says now, letting go of the binoculars, and she stands. She reaches a hand down to me, and I see how flushed her cheeks are; how excited she is. She’s been set on us joining the dredgers for months now, ever since she heard what they were doing down there. We’re both technically too young to be allowed on a dive, but Sof got friendly with Lexi, the woman who leads this crew, and she’s basically persuaded her to let us come today. Sof is amazing like that, amazing with people; she really knows how to talk to them, to get on with them. She’s just really interested in them. Obviously, I’ve been the one to gain the most from that, but that doesn’t stop me envying it, wishing I had it too, that I wasn’t so awkward and practically mute when I’m faced with other people – and it doesn’t stop me, either, feeling this pathetic jealousy of the people she’s talking to, wishing she found me as fascinating as she finds them – and yet I’m her girlfriend. She chose me. So what more do I want from her? I drive myself crazy sometimes, the way my mind works. I wish I could just calm down, enjoy what I have. I take Sof’s hand as we go down the mountain, and she smiles at me, and I remember. Everything is fine.

At the foot of Two Rock, things are beginning to stir; a toddler darts out a door, with an older child following, shouting the syllables that must be the little one’s name, and from several houses I can hear the mutter of radios. We should get ready.

We've told our parents that we're going on a field trip for school, and they haven't asked any questions; before, school was a maze of notes and consent forms and signatures, but here it's much more relaxed. We go to the hall three times a week for classes, and we spend the rest of our time on the sites, learning how to design the buildings and put them up, or in the gardens, trying to convince the fruit and vegetables not to die. Getting away today would be a cinch anyway, because Mum and her group are meeting some fancy Dutch architecture firm, and Sof's dad is catering the lunch, so they'd barely notice even if we put our gear on and clomped down Sunrise Street, fins and snorkels and everything.

We've dived before. We're not idiots; we're not just going to throw ourselves in there without knowing how to do it. We learned when we were in first year, when they just randomly started teaching it as part of PE. Started bussing us up to the dive school in Clongriffin, as though it was the obvious thing to teach a bunch of 12 year old inner city Dublin kids to do.

Some kind of intuition kicking in, even if they didn't understand it, or wouldn't face up to it; Mum says that kind of thinking was everywhere during that time. Says that people knew, but they wouldn't allow themselves to know, and that the knowledge kept pushing out in weird ways, with weird results. The way they decided to close the zoo a few years back, just empty it out and either ship the animals away or put them down, that was another thing. They said the era of animals for entertainment was over, but that wasn't the real reason, the down deep reason. They didn't want certain things to be able to live in the water. It hadn't come yet, they wouldn't admit that it was coming, but yet there they were, trying to decide how it would be. That was about the size of them, alright. Control everything, look after nothing.

I'm ratty today. I'm usually not like this; I don't harp on what happened, and I don't let it have control over my mood. There are too many people up here like that, and there's no point in it, it just slows everything down. But I think I must be nervous, about going down there, about going in, and this is the way it's showing itself: going over things in my head, thinking, now - we're in the jeep with Lexi now, she's driving us down to the place where we'll get on the boat and head in for the site - that Sof is overdoing it, that she's just sweettalking

Lexi, blatantly sucking up to her. Or, could there be something going on between them? Lexi's 25 or 30 or something, but she's gorgeous, and Sof never shuts up about her. But I know I'm just anxious. What if those were sharks Sof saw this morning? What if it's true, what they say about the radioactivity in the water, the way it seeps into your cells? A radioactive shark. Okay, time to stop thinking.

"It's a museum dive today, by the way," Lexi says as we turn onto the Milltown Road. The sandbags here are mental; they're old and filthy now, so they look like the stone walls you used to see in Connemara and those places. And all these big old houses, empty now, or empty of the people who used to be in them, anyway. There are definitely people in there.

"What's a museum dive?" I say, because if I let myself think about these houses I'll wind up thinking about our old house, and our old neighbourhood, and that's not a good idea.

"Kind of what it says on the tin, Amina," Lexi says. "There are still a lot of artefacts down there. Trolls have already scoured the sites for what they can sell on, obviously, and loads of things didn't survive -"

"The Book of Kells," Sof says. "Medieval papiermâché now."

Lexi laughs. "No, someone got that out," she says, "but there were other psalters that, yeah, went the way of the dodo. As did the dodo, come to think of it. Did you two ever get to the Dead Zoo on Merrion Square?" We look at each other, baffled. "You mean in the park?" I say, but Lexi shakes her head.

"Before your time," she says. "Anyway, that's not the museum we're focusing on today. We're diving into the site where the archaeological collections were. All the jewelry and the chalices are long gone, but there are plenty of other things that we want to rescue. The less obvious stuff. You know they had an urn in there from your neck of the woods?"

"Ringsend?"

She shrugs. "Well, maybe, yeah, but this one was from where you live now. Tibbradden. You know the cairn up there?"

"Yeah!" Sof practically shouts. "We look at it every morning!"

"Well, there's something missing from there. And it doesn't belong where the trolls can get it, at the bottom of Lake Sellafeld."

I make a noise, a sort of groan, not meaning to, and Sof gives me a warning look, but Lexi is waving her hand dismissively.

"Don't mind me, don't worry about that," she says. "It's no more dangerous than any other body of water. It's just a hell of a lot more interesting."

"What do you see down there?" Sof says. We're pulling into what seems to be a car park now, with jeeps and trailers everywhere, but as we go further in I see it's not a car park, but an improvised dock, a long launching place for motorboats and dinghies; this is where the water begins. I try to think: we went through Milltown about a mile ago, and then Donnybrook. This must be near the canal.

Lexi turns to us. "We see everything," she says. "All benighted things that go."

Whatever that means. But we're about to find out, I suppose.

And oh, it is so dark down there. So dark and so full. My city: no, no, it is no longer my city. But I love it still. And there goes Sof, disappearing around a pillarstone, sinking down to what must have been a place where people met. The blackness of it. The teeming black pool.

Dublin in the Future

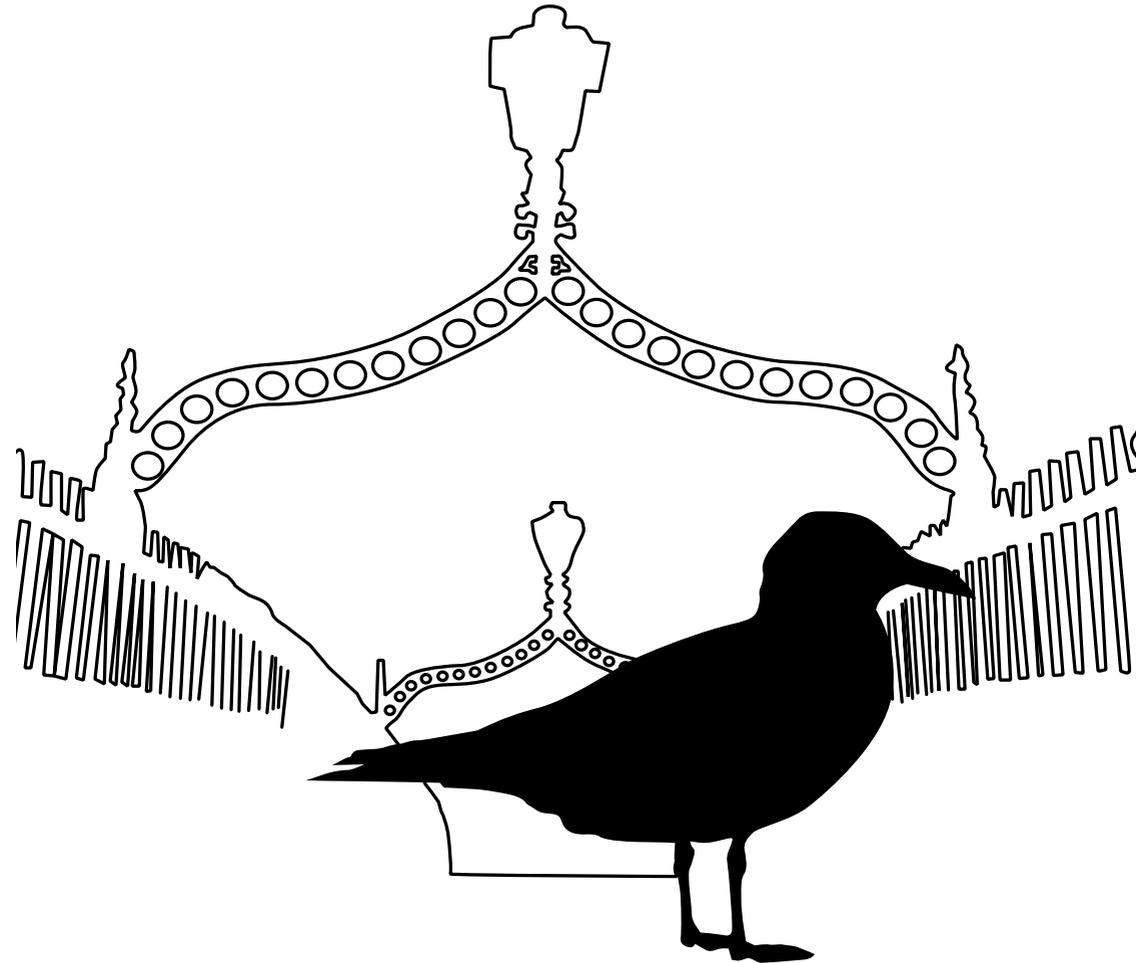
By Gilbert Kelly

(Raheny Library Writers Group)

We're envisaging Dublin in the future,
 A multicultural haven where anything 'll suit ya,
 The lock on Happeny'll make you feel like coupling,
 You'll sing in the streets like Janis Joplin,
 Where the pubs have switched off their tellies,
 Sellin' you things every twenty minutes in cultural
 imperialism ads,
 Trad music will ring out from the Cobblestones and
 craft beers at the Brew Dock,
 The city has somnambulated effortlessly,
 People have come to see that the vision of a dystopian now
 Is the red cow to the bull in the shop full of chinaware,
 People don't stare but smile,
 Everything takes a long while.
 The pace is not so much easy as slow-boat,
 There are a few showboats where tourists laugh and admire
 The spire and the modern architecture.
 You can sign up for lectures and classes
 GAA, Hurling and Camogie
 boogie along to your favourite song in Temple Bar
 Where the cars are banned and no-one throws their cans
 away anymore.
 The city is so clean. Dredge up the Liffey every Sunday
 and everyday feels like a funday.
 There's 10,000 people from South America, 5,000 from the South,
 A few from Brexit Britain, but they all seem to be suffering from
 foot-in-mouth disease. What a farrago!
 I mean, please. Why don't they want to remain European?
 They assert they got different ways of seeing, but they don't.
 The supermarket shelves are less cluttered.

People stutter less and need less.
 You can still get a Sunday roast and the tea is still the same.
 Avonmore is still the milk to score.
 Life feels like a pleasant game.
 Shame the Brits have gone home.....
 Wonder if the censor approves.....the golden rule seems
 to be paint a picture which people will have the gall to
 call a slick makeover.

Has someone sprayed f*ck off duchess on the wall.....!?



The Last Poet

Paula Meehan

(Published in the Irish Times 16 April 2016)

Howth - New Moon of June - 2116
 They will come for us soon
 The agents of the New Machines
 In their watercraft they'll skim across
 The drowned suburbs
 And I'll leave this note
 Though no one might find it
 Now that the blindness
 Comes with the madness

Once upon a time I stood with my grandmother
 On these very cliffs - she would murmur
 The names - lost streets of the city
 In every name the ballast of history
 Low dives kips mansions of stone
 Raheny Kilbarrack Sutton
 Avenues roads crescents parks
 Baldoyle Finglas Coolock
 Under the blue water
 The sunken grave of my mother, her daughter

Said grandmother Hannarafe used say
 She remembered the days
 Of the Old Machines
 Training and grooming the children
 To service them, to stroke and pet them
 Oh yes, she'd say, on the buses, on the trams
 The children gazing into the machines,
 Whispering to them, feeding them scenes
 Of this world and our dreamworld

Downloading our memory hoard
 We interinanimated the machines
 Even as they digitized our brains
 My grandmother Hannarafe would say
 Back in the day

My own grandchild is, I pray, safe
 Radiant! Beauty! named for Hannarafe herself
 The pain of the loss of her, apple of my blind eye
 With her sharp tongue, her ability to scry
 She left last moon with the other children
 They slipped solemn and silent
 Into the small boats, heading south
 Risking all on the word of mouth
 News of settlements where they might make a start
 In machine-free zones of the human heart

They will come for us soon
 The agents of the New Machines
 To enforce the Edict of New Thought
 The New Recalibration Avoidant of Link Rot
 The Final Removal of Un-Logic
 The Great Re-Gathering of the New Demagogic
 The favourite word of the New Regime
 The New News and New Reliability Scheme

When I was a girl Hannarafe would stand
 Here - point across to the Mainland
 She'd say Thank fuck
 We were safe - stuck
 On the Howth side of the water
 Over there they were eating each other
 What luck, she'd say, to be stranded
 Here - the time of the Flood
 She'd say, my geomantic grandmother
 About the Frantic Days before
 The Separation - the bodies - for months
 Washing up against the cliffs - the storm fronts
 Moving over us - a procession of angry gods.
 Those years of the Bad

They will come soon
 The agents of the New Machines
 For the last time I look
 Here, in this last book
 That has survived the Great Uploading
 The Law Against Print designed to bring
 Every human utterance through the Filters
 Of the New Democratic Holy Scanners
 The End of the Road - The End of Memory:
 Modernist Irish Poetry of the Early 21st Century
 I'd rather burn the evidence
 Of my trade, redact to its elements
 The ink the paper the board
 Smoke on the wind
 That drifts at last sovereign and free
 The powerful memory of some ancient tree

Hannarafe, my grandmother taught me
 This old rhyme: Howth for its honey
 Its hives, its hawks, its hounds
 Its handsome boys, its humdudgeon
 And hobthrush, its hasps and hobbler,
 Its hylegs, its hyponyms, its hames.
 She named herself aboriginal
 In a world gone totally institutional

They will come soon
 The agents of the New Machines
 For the girl children, classified Breeders,
 For us old ones, designated Upcyclers
 The boys for Theocratic Leadership Immersion
 Or for Technocratic Service in Data Conversion
 I should have been Upcycled at fifty
 What they call the New Generosity
 I am already too old for that
 Now I'll be rendered for my fat
 My bones for fertilizer
 At the direction of the Agrivizers

But they'll not find the children
 They're gone with the May moon
 Away from the golden gorse blossom
 The foaming lace of the May blossom
 Over the seven waves
 Under the seven stars



