

From These Acorns

The triumph of this year's Cúirt despite the disruptive Icelandic Volcanic Ash is not just a tribute to the energy and dedication of its directors but also an indication of the increasing importance of the festival in Galway's calendar year, a fact that is further underlined by the subtle change in the traditional local greeting of "You won't feel the Christmas" and "You won't feel the Races" to "You won't feel The Arts Festival" and "You won't feel Cúirt".

The positive and immediate reaction of writers all over the country who stepped in enthusiastically to substitute for the writers abroad whose flights were cancelled signals just how culturally important Cúirt is deemed to be nationwide and augurs well for its future.

It was even more significant that while this Volcanic Ash and the cultural cavalry coming over the hill were grabbing the headlines, the underlying work of Cúirt was continuing unabated, a work that expressed itself in the publication of three modest but nonetheless important, not to say vital, publications, The ROPES Journal, Faceless Monsters the second Atlantis Collective Anthology, and the first Wow! in print form from that innovative Salthill publishing house, Wordsonthestreet.

ROPES is the Review of Post Graduate Studies and is published by the current M.A. Class in Publishing in NUI Galway. This is its 18th issue and while there is a sense of the usual suspects among the contributors there are also some exciting and new faces emerging whose contributions add immeasurably to the energy of the journal. In the preface, Daniel Carey explains that the achievement of the ROPES "has been to foster a creative conversation, bringing new writers in contact with established figures who have generously contributed their work". His explanation is borne out by the presence in this issue of Ken Bruen, Rita Anne Higgins, Nuala Ní Chonchuir, Kevin Higgins to name but a few of the established writers along with such new names (to me at least) as Ceara Conway whose poem has something of a breathless quality to it, David O'Doherty whose story has a wonderful satiric touch to it and Kevin Boyle whose sensitive story bespeaks the warm humanity of his profession.

also a product of Adrian Frazier's M.A. Literature and Publishing Courses. This, the Atlantis Collective's second anthology, is edited by Nuala Ní Chonchuir and while most of the contributors also featured in the first anthology, again there are a few new faces which give the collection a fresh impetus. A feature of this issue is the experimentation with Flash fiction. Some of these experiments work, others don't, but they introduce an interesting element of 'apprentices at work' to the book. Also evident here is a progression from the previous Anthology as with Alan Caden's 'The Boatman' in which echoes of O. Henry and Guy De Maupassant can be detected and Paul Mc Mahon's 'Row Me Up Some Whiskey Joe', a fine demonstration of a growing maturity.

The Wow! anthology is a wonderful example of the long road that faces writers as they struggle to find their personal voice. Published online since 2004, this is the first issue in print recognising the importance and the permanence of the printed word. There is an energy and humanity in these poems and stories that delights as well as informs. Sarah Clancy's 'Hippy, Get A Job...' has a sense of rhythm that gives the poem a driving force while Gerry Galvin's 'For the Love of Daisy' is as compassionate as it is suave. Overall the contributions resonate with an ironic, sometimes dark, sense of humour and a welcome humanity.

Given the ethos of Cúirt, it seems a pity that there is no Irish language contribution in any of these publications. Maybe there is an opening for a similar journal as Gaeilge. It would complete the circle.

While Cúirt may have had little to do directly with these publications, the festival creates the environment in which they can emerge and in so doing provides the people of Galway with a solid cultural future, a precious gift indeed. By far the best way to accept that gift would be to purchase the books and give all those responsible the support they so richly deserve.