

Cover Letter/Bio

Callum J. McCready is an Irish artist. Previously based out of Fisterra and Galicia, he has recently returned to Belfast. When not working by day he moonlights as a writer.

Over fifty poems of his work has been published in numerous journals including *A New Ulster*, *Bindweed Magazine* and *The Galway Review*. He has a number of projects in the works and an intention to cross over into other disciplines.

When not bound by the ball-and-chain of his desk he enjoys gardening, exercising, reading, listening to music, watching movies and spending time with family and friends.



Por mi otra madre. Joan, te amo y te extraño. Muchas gracias. Que triunfes.

The Ballad of The Bull

"So gimme a stage
Where this bull can rage
And though I can fight,
I'd much rather recite.
That's entertainment.
That's entertainment..."

Gotta make weight, get in shape.
Ten pounds in a month's good...
for a start.

While I'm content sitting in
Pop wants to go out for a few,
and who would I be to turn down some quality time
but sure enough we're having a good wee chat
and some drunk comes over.
He's not a bad guy, off his trolley and all,
science teacher, family man, but by his own word he's barred
from every pub in Holywood and after about
five minutes all I want to do is punch the
fucker in the face for daring to intrude on
what me and my Dad got going on.
What an embarassment of a human being,
just because you can't stand your own family
despite being lucky to have one doesn't mean you get to
barge in on ours.

But I'm a changed man.

In times past, I was The Bull,
fueled partly by alcohol but mostly by rage,
this unspoken, pent-up aggression, an anger,
a darkness within, deep down inside,
always bubbling near the surface.

I was a happy child growing up with a good family and friends. Minus the silver spoon I had everything in front of me, could have been whatever I wanted but instead of choosing the easy road I chose to kick, punch, fight and scream against everyone and everything.

Somewhere down the line, I can't remember when,
I turned my back, decided to crawl inside myself,
taking my insecurities out on the world at large.
This was mine for the taking, everyone else

simply in it.

I used to be a good boy but then I made them grow to hate me. I was a terrible bridge-burner, blowing up paths behind me with sticks of dynamite to protect myself, my arrogance a mask to the fact that I was a frightened kid who could never comprehend why the world was so big.

I guess that's why I took solace in the fight.

I made strange romantic notions about brutality, the inherent violence surrounding such acts.

Thus, in another manner, standoffishness and unpredictability became a part of my character.

I could never express myself the way I really wanted to so I did it with my fists.

When I look at the scars on my knuckles I see an old's mans hands, years of hardened frustration from punching walls again and again, over and over until I no longer felt the pain but here is it's physical embodiment, a testament to my St. Vitus' Dance with sanity or lack thereof.

I told my father of standing up to grown men twice my age. He shook his head, said that wasn't the right way to go about it. I agreed but back then you couldn't have told me otherwise.

I was told a story by a friend about how three of us in our school uniforms were challenged and threatened by a group of guys in Belfast, one of whom implied that he was carrying a knife (I can't remember. A vague fumbling in a pocket, an image, maybe?). Apparently I stood my ground; was that courage or did I have a death wish?

Years went by. I went into school with the odd black eye. When I started uni I was on the losing end of two scraps in one night; concussion, broken nose, corrective surgery. Like that of my broken arm on the blue mats, I carry this travelogue of injuries like a road-map, a collection of battered bones and internal wounds.

One counsellor said my temperament is like that of a volcano;

I don't go from 1-to-2 or 1-to-3 or even 1-to-5,
I snap, go straight from 1-to-10, explode.

Another asked me to consult upon my great love
and tell him what film is most like my life.
I took a bit of time to answer, but upon re-watching
I said Raging Bull.

In a sense, I suppose it explains a lot.

Hence, after years of duking it out,
I've decided to retire to a quiet, solitary life.

No longer the proverbial bull in a china shop.
He's still there some, somewhat, but an older bull
ready to overcome all the bullshit and learn to start living.

"That's entertainment..."

Reflections

On the cusp of half-sleep I pour myself another cup of tea.
The Aria of Bach's Goldberg Variations plays in my head.

red wine or whiskey'd
go down well right about now,
an Italian redhead or Latin brunette sitting in my lap as
we talk, ruminate, philosophise, reminisce through the night.

I read Post Office again, more or less in one sitting.
In between this and the occasional piss
I do my rounds.

Under the bridge, cold white light bounces off the Lagan.

These floating shapes, murky shades in darkness, seem as if
they're projections of the thoughts inside my head.

Formless uncertainty, fluid liquidity,
rippling currents moving in mysterious waves.

In fog and rain, the picture's unclear. However,
There remains divine, intrinsic beauty.

I've looked long and hard into my own personal abyss,
come out the other side, if not unscathed then still alive.

The final conflict was within;
now that I've faced it, I look the other way.

The challenges remain but without the usual pain.

I know myself to a greater degree, the things I'm capable of.

Imbued, I'm shed of the shackles of ignorance
but not unaware of the fact that I really know nothing.

Blue lights, sirens dance among puddles and stones.

I listen to trickling streams, drips echoing,
vehicles drifting past on the road above,
over me, now, coming close...

While I still have time I stand by the river,
look out on the water by the light of the moon.

brand new starlights

standing in the vomitory at the Peace Proms,
the assembled mass of schoolchildren
and choirs are led on by a conductor,

a young singer,
in dedication to Dolores O'Riordan, begins
her interpretation of The Cranberries' Zombie,

and
I get a flash
which takes me back to
other times,
others places... -

I sing a belter of that one!

- drunken nights as a teenager,
all the things we got up to;

the life,
the love,
the laughter,
tears,
everything,

and
years later,
standing there
I feel it all coming over,

a powerful wave crashing against the rocks,
the raging sea's ebb and flow,

so much so it takes my all to stop me turning back the clocks,
return again and again within myself,

but
I've got to
keep going.

Later the conductor asks for
audience participation so he can
record something for his Twitter page.
This used to be the part when lighters were raised.

Now,
the
brand new starlights
of
mobile devices are our pie-eyes in the sky,

oversimplified radial reflections of the windows into our soul.

Though well-intended,
it strikes a false note.

Our gods and idols
have been replaced;

by what?

wisdom in volume

if I had a year for every poem
I'd be older than Methuselah...

add to that the stories,
the novel(s), screenplays,
audio recordings, photography,

if, as
Klaus Schulze said
on the cover sleeve of his *Mirage*,
creativity is an extension of being,

then by that criteria I'd be
a standard-bearing mage
with

wisdom in volume,

a Portuguese Man O' War with long-tentacled tendrils
reaching out to sea across oceans of consciousness.

If that's the case and I'm supposed to be as clever as I am,
then why do I do and say stupid things, feel like a fool,
a bestial, foul, ignorant creature of relative youth?

Is it the absence of romance,
a lack of self-fulfilment,
personal goals,
ambitions
and such,
being a man of some intelligence
yet knowing absolutely nothing?

I used to get hung up on such things;
now,
not so much.

It's not like I've reconciled myself to mediocrity.
It's just that I've decided I'm happy to grow
in my own time and space, progress
naturally in the fresh open air.

Everything comes around,
happens when it has to,
is supposed to,

You can't force your fortune,
but you can try your best to
play your cards right and
make your own luck.

While it's always easier to say
with the benefit of hindsight,
I feel that for the first time
I know it's my turn to spin
the wheel, cash in my chips.

I expect to live a thousand years,
and if not in the sense that we imagine
then certainly many lifetimes' worth through
infinitude, all things beginning and ending as such, time
being an infinite series of parallel and concurrent
Mobius strips folding in upon themselves.

Heck,
maybe I'll even be a millionaire
in the trust sense of the word;
all the riches in the world don't hold a candle to
the treasures of the heart.

There's still so much to do,
and though I have an eternity
sometimes all I can think about
is how little time I've got to do it.

But that isn't true.
It's another lie, an
act of self-deception.

"It's all for the best."
Like Candide, I'm
a perennial optimist.

I hope and I pray

that I'll see another day and smile,
for there is work to be done,
so much more to learn and
a whole lot of life to enjoy.

0136, Thursday 20th June, 2019. Botanic Gardens.

"Good things come..."

I want someone to
look at me
the way
Claire Standish does John Bender,

deliver a kiss to
melt the armour
I've built around
my black heart. –

It might be just that,
what with all the cigarettes...

- An exchange of gifts;
an earring to
pierce my skin,
pain to let me know
how it feels to exist,
live and love again.

I made a necklace
of an intended pairing,
a matching set of
cheap rings and keychains.

"Are you sure it's healthy to be wearing such a thing when you're trying to
move on?"

Maybe not, but it serves as a reminder of -

Love is beyond rhyme or reason, all the more wonderful for it.

- a tribute to a beautiful friendship.

Photographs, trinkets, accessories,
infatuations and indulgences.

Sometimes
I want it so bad
that it hurts.

But
I've got to lay
the groundwork
before I build the house...