

Inkslingers Blended Session

14th October 2023

The Prompt from The Bag Was:

Five Words Challenge

“Train, Gullible, Mine, Experiment, Fetid ”

And the Visual



What Cannot Be Seen Within the Branches

Greg Fields

When he was a boy, long before the shimmer of wonder had faded to a drab grey, Matthew Cooney thought the streets held adventure. He learned only later that those same streets that drew him then for play and exploration and experiment would become the landscape of his abandonment, the contours of the abuse he suffered, the loneliness he felt, and the anger spawned from the empty, dirty, sometimes violent days. That would come later, and it would stay with him the rest of his too-short life.

But for a boy of six, one whose father was too often gone and whose mother was too often drunk, the streets offered a wondrous escape. When he opened the door to his small rowhouse, when he stepped from dim light into sun, Matthew Cooney saw himself crossing a threshold to a different world – fresher, cleaner, innocent, and open to his imagination.

He had friends. Boys usually a bit older who would show him things – how to climb a tree, how to throw a baseball, how to tease the neighbourhood cat. Few boys Matthew's age had the freedom to wander on their own, so it was left to the older boys to show him how things worked and what could be done. They had an edge to them – wiser, and Matthew sensed, harder. They hinted at what Cooney could only imagine, and the hinting excited him. Matthew Cooney was anxious to grow older.

On an October afternoon Young Matthew left his doorway and looked both ways down the tatty street that defined his slowly expanding world. No one in either direction, at least no one who could offer him time or adventure. An older woman walked her dog, a gaggle of teenaged girls laughed their way down to the corner store, an occasional bike rolled by driven by faceless peddlers. The others might come out later, he thought. For now, he would be on his own.

Near the corner a small patch of green had been set off by the city, part of Washington's effort to brighten the areas that needed brightening. Not much to it, more a token than a park, but there it was. It had grass,

and a small stand with bags for pet waste that were almost never used, and, in the middle of it, an oak tree, planted after the neighbourhood was developed and now large enough to shade both sidewalk and street.

Matthew headed for the green and looked up at the tree that, in his six-year-old perspective, struck him as enormous, climbing to the sky, and perhaps beyond. A wonder it was, and Matthew Cooney felt drawn to wonders. He stepped over the small iron borders, then shimmied up to the lowest branches, then to those above, and those above those.

Higher than he had ever been, he nestled into a place where two sturdy branches came together. And there he looked out onto the city in a new way, a way only open to curious six-year-olds. October, and the leaves had begun to change, showing colors he had never seen before. A slight breeze parted them and cooled his skin. What seemed miles below him, buses rumbled past and cars zipped around each other. And in it all was a sense of silence that the streets could not offer. Matthew Cooney sat above his small world, looked down on it, and regarded himself a rare and most fabulously fortunate boy.

‘This tree,’ he thought to himself. ‘This tree. I can see everything from here. My house, my street, the big buildings all around. This tree. This Tree of Life.’

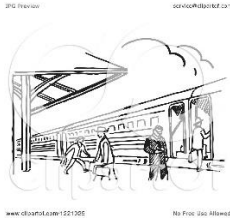
Matthew Cooney sat in his tree for an indeterminate time. He regarded all he could, took in the views, spied on the people walking by who took no notice of a small boy nestled in thick branches. He felt himself cloaked, invisible, and omniscient.

He could not see ahead of him, though. He could not see what the years would be, nor how this tree would eventually wither and fail from too much neglect, too much bus exhaust, and too much time. He could not see that he would do the same. As would most of those who walked these streets.

All Matthew Cooney could see on this glorious October afternoon was the view from on high, and all he could feel was the bark and the leaves and the breeze and the promise of a Tree of Life. It would have to do, and on this rare day, it was enough.

Train Station

Mark L'estrange



It took ages to get through to the station, eventually someone answered, and it wasn't an Irish accent it was a broken English voice. "Hello, can I help you?" "This is the Super here I am in charge of this station who is this please?" "Oh, I was waiting for you to call I believe you have something that belongs to us?" "What might that be?" "I think you know."

"We don't have anything belong to you, I would advise you guys to leave the station I am getting in touch with Garda HQ now." He hung up on him straight away."

They phoned the army man they were dealing with who was keeping them up to date, he explained to him what was happening.

He said, "I will talk to someone else I can trust in here, he is higher up than me so he will know what to do."

Paddy said to the Super. "How about I go in to the station and get them spinning so we can get the rest of the Guards out of there?" "I think we will be better off waiting for twenty minutes to see if the army get back to us, in case they are all armed, I know your good but don't think you can dodge bullets can you?"

"No you have a good point there."

Then he got a text from his phone from an unknown number saying "This is Carlos we have taken control of your police station, I would urge you to play ball with us because you don't want to be responsible for damaging your neutrality over this, as you know we have the backing of Key figures in the Mexican army, We will give you guys five hours to get our equipment and men back to us or we will escalate the situation, we

will send you our location to meet us in five hours, we have a tree planted in Wicklow, we planted it a few years ago we call it the tree of life we will meet you there.”

Paddy said, “That is a long text who is it from?” “The crooks in the station, they want to meet us in five hours.” “Well I think it might be a good idea to talk to the authority’s in Mexico, I’m sure there are a few honest people In charge.” “Good thinking Paddy I will give them a call now.”

To be continued

It's Not Me
Gerard Byrne

It's not me, it's not you, it's not them, so then who is that makes you feel the way you do?,

Who is it that makes you shy away from public view?,

Your silence feeds them with confidence,

Your inaction fuels them further to travel onto other hosts and make their lives a misery, just like your own.

They say hatred is like wishing someone dead and then drinking the poison yourself,

Now you do the exact same thing,

Letting them win, letting them grow bigger, letting them carry on with their lives as if nothing is gonna change.

But you are the one that can change it,

You are the key to your own mess,

All you need is the courage to unlock the truth for the world to see,

I'm not saying that life will be immediately better,

But it will get there, some day.

Learning to Pout

Tadhg O'Brien

A little boy sat on the train:
He counted sheep inside his brain,
He kicked his feet he tapped his pen,
His mother shooshed him once again.

He pled: "it's hot! I need some air!"
A fellow passenger despaired.
Mum she grumbled, up she stood:
"The window's open now be good!"

Thick the stench of summer weed;
The shallow pools of seas recede
by Sandymount the fetid airs
did swirl about for all to share.

The boy contrite he knew the time
had come from down his plinth to climb.
"Oh mum, oh everyone, this slime!
This crime, this time the fault is mine!

"I will be still I'll be no pest,
the upstart kid you all detest!
Let's all relax and let us rest,
And close the windows, for the best."

One passenger he raised a brow,
Another smirked, and chortled: "Now,
how gullible you think we are?
Besides, for us, this is no scar."

"The beauty of our nature's world
The many scents it has unfurled!
Let us bask in this here portal,
Mother nature's breath immortal!"

Mum she sat and coughed a laugh,
This experiment so naff,
Our boy he sat and made a pout,
Folded his arms, and kicked at nowt.

Inkslingers

Matthew Tubridy

All the members in the Inkslingers,
All die,
The Russian army drops a bomb on the building,
The building is a smouldering wreck
The family members of the Inkslingers come,
A leg here, an arm there, it's gruesome!
It's a cluster bomb,
It fell through the roof and then exploded,
With devastating consequences,
The Manager of the Centre is working in the attic room,
She sees the bomb come through the ceiling,
She recognises it as a cluster bomb,
It has a Z on it,
She tries to leg it down the stairs,
But it goes off,
Her body is propelled down the stairs,
Her skull hits the wall,
The ceiling the Inkslingers are in collapses,
They are crushed,
A big fire ball consumes the whole building,
The Taoiseach comes, sees the used bomb, with the Z on it,
He says, 'Those Russians will pay for this!'
He rings up Joe Biden, tells what happened,
Joe commiserates,
I'll give the Ukrainians more weapons he assures,
The US fighter jets fly over Moscow.

The Tree of Life

Elaine Reardon

A forgotten gravel road led to cellar holes scattered through a small field and forest edge. Two old dug wells were still filled with water, so you had to mind yourself when you walked, not to put a foot in. The stream, small as it was, still had remnants of a dam, with water still pooled behind it. Beavers had come and reworked the dam, keeping it in good working order. There were a few old metal pots scattered by the cellar holes, the forest had reclaimed the land. In spring the old lilacs and day lilies still bloomed where the front doors had been.

The Apple Tree was planted in the centre of the field when the settlers had first arrived. Oh, it had fallen upon hard times, been nipped on by deer, had branches broken by heavy snow. But the tree resurrected every spring, and all manner of animals still visited. Birds still landed on its branches, deer would bring their young to eat apples. Porcupines left its sweet wood alone. It was a fine place to stumble upon in the spring, when the wild violets flowered and the air smelled of honey from the apple blooms. While she was old, she still managed some sweetness to beguile the bees. And they'd come, too. They all came to nourish themselves, to take in what was offered.

Sometimes if you happened to look out of the corner of your eye you might catch the small movements of something. You'd swear someone, or something, had just run past you, almost touched you, when you visited near May Day.

Now it was autumn equinox. Leaves covered the ground like an orange and yellow carpet. Beechnuts and acorns made a feast for all, from chipmunk to bear. They all gathered the fine harvest before snow fell.

This apple tree had been in the centre of this village, on the common where people gathered and shared its fruits along with conversation. Animals still paused to gather, and a few people who found the old road when they walked would stop for a bit..

If you come on the autumn equinox at the first light of dawn, you may see the host return to the tree. You might see some movement of gossamer fabrics, from the edge of your vision, or the movement of

moths flying to the tree before the first light grows strong. You'll remember this for all your days. You might pick an apple and feel the desire to leave something there, maybe a silver coin, or some special trinket, before you return home.

The Struggle Is Real

Gerard Byrne

Bumping along the outside,
Struggling to break through,
This thing called life confounds me,
A drug induced mental stew.

Too many protocols to follow,
Too much structure expected of you,
As Ronan Keating once said,
Life is a rollercoaster,
But final destination keeps coming true.

Crashing and burning more times than I can count,
Scurrying back to the safety of my house,
Sitting alone for relative peace of mind,
No more voices trying to unwind what's left of my patience that's
quickly draining over time.

I dream of a lounge in a sun kissed destination,
A place away from the worries of this world,
But everything costs money these days,
Even the rich have wolves at the door.

Stuff

Matthew Tubridy

Sitting with a psychotherapist, she asks
How was your childhood?
She takes out a joint,
Smoke that man!
Then your transported to a massage parlour,
You get rubbed on your back,
Suddenly the bishop arrives, he blesses you,
He goes on about Our Lady,
Then you're in a Youth 2000 retreat,
But they pump hash smoke into the room,
The witch doctors come in and start dancing around!
Then Bill drives through Canada,
He eats 12 pancakes with maple syrup,
You go into Dublin City Centre at 2am,
People milling around,
Listening to Guns n Roses Sweet Child o mine,
Drinking, taking drugs,
The heroin addict lies on the floor,
The political party leader makes an impassioned speech,
His ratings go up!
The cast of 'More than you know'
By Axwell /\ Ingrosso Dance around.

Tree Of Life

Bernadette O'Reilly

After eating an apple
Da planted the pips in
A Jam jar
Then in the soil at the end
Of our back garden
He nurtured this small patch
Not knowing if it would bear fruit
This tree grew tall, took root
Spreading it's branches
Gave birth to small sour green apples
The years passed
The trunk of this tree grew lumps
Da pronounced it had cancer
Da was also telling us he had cancer too.

A Torture Chamber

Matthew Tubridy

A torture chamber is made of steel,
It's a circular design,
You put a man in it,
Without a toilet,
He pees on the floor, it gathers at his feet,
He has a tiny hole,
To look out on,
But all he can see are ducks being killed,
His position has been arranged by the Minister for Justice,
He is also an Art exhibition in the courtyard of IMMA,
When the visitors approach he yells!
Get me out of here!
They think there's some kind of Bull in there!
Or a elephant squashed,
The gallery curators unlock a hole in the roof
and drop a sandwich down it,
He gets the same rations as the prisoners in Mountjoy,
He's prisoner 571,
Eventually the exhibition is over,
Prisoner 571 is taken away in a big truck,
Back to Mountjoy,
He rattles his door.

Life Tree

Gerard Byrne

Doctor Hawkins closed the blinds and sat down in his big comfy chair that had seen better days. It creaked loudly under the pressure of his body weight, “now, I’m gonna start saying a number of words and all I want you to do is tell me what word you think of when you hear them. It’s that simple. Are you ready to start?”

Seamus nodded his head like one of those annoying dogs that people put in the back window of their car in the hope of being humorous, “I’d ready Doc. Hit me with the first one”

“Now, now”, scolded Doctor Hawkins, “this isn’t a game of baseball or cricket. This is supposed to be a relaxing environment and I want you to close your eyes as well. Might help your brain relax and encourage you to be quick with your replies. Let’s get to it. The first word is train”

“Late”, Seamus had been waiting thirty five minutes for the bloody thing that morning and he didn’t think he’d make his appointment on time. No apologies or reasons for the hold up. Just his life put on hold once again. The bloody transport system in Ireland was a joke. Didn’t matter to him that it had never been late for the previous two years.

“Good, good”, Doctor Hawkins fixed his steel rimmed glasses back onto his red nose, “now the next word is gullible”

“Me”, replied Seamus. Gullible enough to pay a hundred euros a session for this bullshit. He decided not to vocalise his complaint.

“Very good”, Doctor Hawkins wrote down a few more notes on his pad. Mostly about paying his television licence and getting milk in the local shop, “now the next word is mine”

“Land”, something he’d happily stand on to end his suffering. Maybe even stick it under the doctor’s chair and see how fast the old git can move.

“Experiment”

“Now”

Doctor Hawkins was visibly confused by Seamus's answer, "what do you mean by that?"

Seamus shrugged his shoulders, "suppose I feel like I'm in an experiment or something like that. You asking me about weird words and all that shite"

"Let's move on", Doctor Hawkins scribbled down twat on his notepad and then quickly crossed it out before writing dickhead instead, "what about the word fetid"

"Like as in the cheese?", that was the only time Seamus had heard that word before.

"Yes"

"But what does the word mean?"

"It's means that something smells extremely unpleasant"

Seamus wanted to say you as his answer, thanks to the Doctor's bad bodily odours and the stink of whiskey and cigars off his breath, but he bit his tongue and said, "my wife's feet", instead.

"Interesting", Doctor Hawkins scribbled more notes down, "now for the final word, "tree"

"Life", replied Seamus without even having to think about his answer.

"Why life?", asked Doctor Hawkins.

"You should always choose life", Seamus smiled back.

Doctor Hawkins tutted under his breath and tapped the top of his notepad with his well chewed pen, " is that the Wham or trainspotting kind?"

"Whichever suits you", Seamus glanced at his watch. He was growing tired of this session.

"If you won't take this serious Mr Campbell. I won't be able to help you with your problems"

"You know what Doc", Seamus got up from his seat and fixed his jacket back into place, "my problems always seem to end at the door on the

way out of here, and that's what I'm doing right now. See you around", and with that, he left his doctor's office for the last time. He was hit by a train on the way home. On the positive side, it was on time.

The people on Parnell Street

Matthew Tubridy

The people on Parnell Street,
Where are they going?
Going to get a donor kebab!
Everyone must get food within a few hours,
If it's in the wintertime and it's cold or raining,
Everyone must find shelter,
That's why Bob sets up a cafe serving hot chocolate,
And if the customer goes into cardiac arrest
he has a defibrillator to bring them back to life,
Everyone needs to be near a hospital,
Everyone needs to reproduce,
So they put on flashy denim clothes,
And gel in their hair,
On a cruise up the Norwegian fjords,
The passengers have all they need,
Shelter and food,
And a view to look at,
But then there is the man in the middle of the Sahara desert,
God put him there,
He has no clothes, no food or drink,
He curses God,
He will be dead in a week or 2,
But then God slams a MacDonalds down there
right where he is lying dejected,
God is a staff in that McDonalds he feeds the man with a spoon,
He feeds him milkshakes,
Then slam! A clothes shop falls down beside the man
A staff member there walks over to the Man,
He gives man robes suited to protect him against the Sahara Sun,
The clothes shop staff is an Apostle of God, the staff in McDonald's,
Then the man says Get me out of here!
A dresser buggy appears,
Man drives it fast to a city on the Mediterranean,
He gets a ferry to Italy and makes it to Milan,

He tells people there was God in the Sahara desert,
And an Apostle of God,

The Key to my dream

Daniel Munduruku

(excerpt)

Translated by Heloisa Prieto

After leaving home, I walked for a long time. The sky was dark, cloudy and I knew heavy rain was going to fall. But I had a long way to go and I could not allow myself to cloud my mind with such worries. In my straw bag I had some slices of Cassava bread, fresh fruit, and a bottle of water. The day went by without a single drop of rain, just like the xaman had predicted. I kept that in mind. I had to remember that things do not always happen as they seem. Some days are not born to be rainy ones. Rain doesn't always fall, no matter how many clouds one can see in the sky.

That night, I found an old house. I thought it would be empty, but I had a surprise. When I got close to it, I noticed a clay pot on the wood stove. Then I saw an elderly lady dropping some ingredients in the clay pot. She did not turn around to see me, but she seemed aware of my presence, because she gestured to me as an invitation to join her. I greeted her formally, as I had learned to do as a boy. I told her I was very happy to be there. At this point, she turned and smiled back at me saying:

“Hello, grandson, you don't know who I am, do you? You see, among us, all elderly people are grannies and we see all of you, the young ones, as our children, we don't care about bloodlines.”

I nodded negatively. She laughed again.

That old fool! He never told you about me, right?

I nodded again, feeling very awkward. The old woman laughed for the third time. She gestured telling me to sit at the wood bench by the wall. I thanked her and I took my seat, waiting for her to give me some chibé, our typical dish. She brought me a meal consisting of minced cassava and a watermelon slice. I was really hungry, but I tried to be polite, eating slowly. She noticed my good manners and insisted I should eat some more, because I was about to face dangerous challenges. I did not dare ask her about them, but I felt deep anxiety.

Dear grandchild, you are not here by chance. That old fox sent you to me so that I can give you answers he cannot share with you. Besides, he knows I hold a key that is only mine. No one else will be able to teach you how to use it.

I listened to her words carefully. That conversation was really interesting. The granny said no more. She raised and walked to the oven to check her pans. There were two of them. One was larger than the other. After stirring them with her wooden spoon, she turned to me and said:

I can give you the key, but there will be a price to pay. You will have to live with me for a whole year. You will have to help me plant, cut wood, x herbal medicines. You will also learn my stories and some of my secrets. I couldn't believe it. I asked her if my mentor knew about all of that. She laughed and nodded.

I would never do anything without his consent. We have made arrangements and, although your mentor and I are far away, physically, we can always get in touch. You see, both of us are ancient sorcerers, my son. Our presence in this world goes far beyond our physical bodies.

I realized I had no choice. I just had to stay. I also realized my journey as a student in the art of dreaming was about to begin...