Foreword

A question that writers are often asked, besides 'where do you get your ideas', is 'do you write for an audience or for yourself?' Some writers come down firmly on one side or another. In *On Writing*, Stephen King instructs us to 'write the first draft with the door closed … Don't worry about making other people happy.' On the other hand, Kevin Barry admits that he goes against the grain: 'Some writers will tell you they never think about the reader, but I think about the reader all the time.'

In reality, for most writers it's not a binary choice, but a blend of both approaches; whether we're writing for ourselves or for an ideal reader likely fluctuates depending on what stage of a project we're at. We write for ourselves, of course – to make sense of our thoughts, and to make sense of the world. We're compelled to write because something we've experienced has caused a frenzy inside of us; we write towards something, or against something; we write to figure things out.

But we also write to communicate. We write to understand ourselves better but also to feel less alone. In our writing we say, 'this is what I think' or 'this is what happened to me' or 'this is how I feel,' and then we offer it to a reader. At that point, our story or poem is no longer ours; a reader might love what we write, or hate it, or worst of all, feel indifferent. But every so often, what we write is reflected in the reader, and they might respond by saying, 'This is how it is for me, too.'

As Alan Bennett wrote in *The History Boys*: 'The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling,

a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours.'

Publications like *Quarryman*, and the works of fiction, poetry and non-fiction inside, offer these outstretched hands. In a world as cynical and throwaway as ours – where tech bros cozy up to autocrats to accumulate more millions; where Grok, Gemini, and ChatGPT steal the work of artists in order to chew it up and spit it back out again; where whole days can be lost to the doomscroll and the algorithm – the continued success of publications like *Quarryman* is all the more essential. In the haze of digital smoke and mirrors, it's important and commendable to provide a space for something genuine: a safe haven, a true labour of love. Congratulations to everyone involved in this beautiful volume: writers, editors, proofreaders, designers, organisers and committee members alike. What a generous gift to the reader. Now, let's dive in.

Eimear Ryan
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