

STUDENTS' UNION



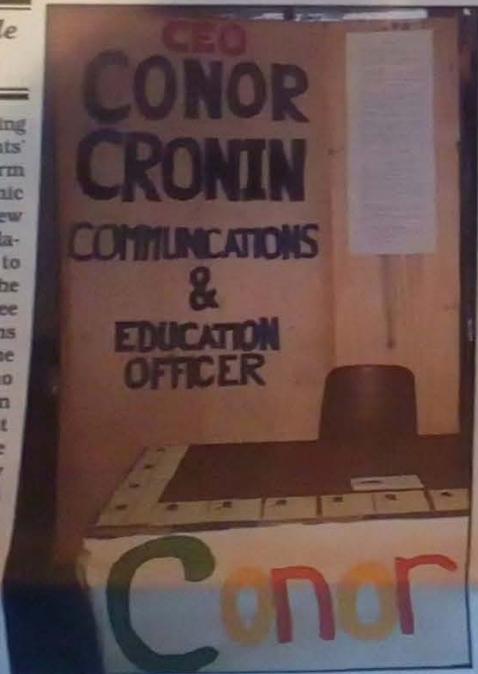
# an Focal

University of Limerick Students' Union

## "Change Honours TP requirement!" - Review Committee

By Duncan O'Toole  
& Declan Quinn

As a result of a meeting requested by the Students' Union early this term through the Academic Programme Review Committee, a recommendation is being sent back to this committee to drop the honours TP honours degree requirement. As regulations now stand a student in the college of Education who does not have an honours in Teaching Practice will not receive an honours degree regardless of the QCA they are on. The Students' Union have always stated that this was grossly unfair as it left certain students with great QCA's out of an honours degree and deprived them of any post graduate opportunities. The idea of having to put this extra stipulation on the awarding of a degree is contrary to the concept of QCA. It is also contrary to the concept of University, that is it doesn't open a student up to different types of



## Doran, Kiely, Cronin

College of Education who does not have an honours in Teaching Practice will not receive an honours degree regardless of the QCA they are on. The Students' Union have always stated that this was grossly unfair as it left QCA's out of an honours degree and deprived them of any post graduate opportunities. The idea of having to put this extra stipulation on the awarding of a degree is contrary to the concept of QCA. It is also contrary to the concept of University, that is it doesn't open a student up to different types of education and learning. The honours TP requirement was something that was criticised by a number of extern examiners last year when they were asked to assess the courses and grading for education courses in UL. It was out of this that the recommendation to set up a review committee arose.

The committee eventually met last week on the issue and the general consensus from Lecturers and Students' Union at the meeting was that this requirement should be dropped. The situation from here is that this recommendation will go back to the chairperson of the Academic Programme Review Committee, Leo Colgan. From there, unless opposed by members on that committee it will go to academic council who will be asked to approve the change. It is hoped that once this change is accepted that it will apply to Students as soon as possible.



# Doran, Kiely, Cronin

The election race was completed in full late Thursday night of election week. The night saw the end of weeks of preparation and hard work from the different candidates and their campaign teams. Of all the positions the position of CEO was won the most convincingly. Cronin being awarded 1761

votes to Ryan's 588. The other two positions were as predicted closely fought battles. Tallies from the first vote (CEO) predicted from the ballot papers that Doran and Piggott would be neck in neck on first preference votes and that Keily had the edge on Hennessy in the fight for position of Deputy

President/ Welfare officer. The Tallies were far from wrong. Keily beat Hennessy in the DP election 1352 votes to 1000 and all eyes turned to the Presidential post. The first count resulted in Doran and Piggott as the crucial pair, with Doran having 45 more first preference votes over Piggott. As

Enright and Mulligan were eliminated it became clear that Doran was on line to become President elect for ULSU. After all of Mulligan's votes were redistributed Doran emerged with 1250 to Piggott's 987. Full Election Table on page 2.

## UL staff Union vote for industrial action!

By Duncan O'Toole

Once again the staff and the University personnel authorities are in confrontation. Confrontation between the Staff Union and UL management is not unusual. On Friday April 24th the Staff Union, MSF held a ballot of its members on two issues. The ballot was a simple yes/no of its members on two issues. MSF were asking for a mandate to increase

industrial action on two issues. The two issues regarded firstly an alleged breach of a Labour Relations Commission agreement with regards to a former employee of UL and the other issue was an alleged breach of procedure in the contract termination of a permanent member of staff. The ballot itself resulted in a mandate been given for the alleged breach of a Labour Relations Commission agreement however in the case of the second case staff voted against the

Union request for increased industrial action.

In the latter case a detailed memo was sent to all staff the day of the ballot. This memo contained dates, times, quotes and arguments with relation to the contract termination of a certain former member of staff, over whom the current trouble has arisen. In this memo the personnel department maintained that it had gone through the proper procedures more than once in this

instance. This was put to MSF who stated that this memo was "not factually correct and MSF are in the process of responding to that memo". When it was put to the Personnel department that the memo they sent to each member of staff was not all true, the head of Personnel, Dermot Coughlan would not comment on the issue stating that it was an internal issue. Whether the memo was correct

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Week 13  
Semester 2 '96

Elections

Sexual  
Harassment

Poetry

Ents

# News



**The Green Onion Caffe**

Ellen St., Limerick.

Tel: 061 400710

## Election Results

### CEO Results

Total Poll	2398
Total Spoilt	49
Total Valid Poll	2349

Cronin, Conor	1761
Ryan, Piarais	588

*Declare  
Cronin, Conor Elected.*

### D. P. / Welfare Results

Total Poll	2393
Total Spoilt	41
Total Valid Poll	2352

Hennessy, Michael	1000
Kiely, Elaine	1352

*Declare  
Kiely, Elaine Elected.*

## Presidential Results

		1st Count	2nd Count	Total	3rd		
Total Poll	2348						
Total Spoilt	29						
Total Valid Poll	2329						
Quota 1165+1	1166						
		Doran, Seamus	864	84	948	302	1250
		Enright ,	Joe 300 *				
		Mulligan, Karl	365	124	489 *		
		Piggot, Keith	819	60	879	108	987

\* Eliminated 1st Count      \* Eliminated 2nd Count

***Declare Doran, Seamus Elected.***

# Brian's Comment

Congratulations to Seamus, Elaine and Conor. The Sabbatical elections are over for another year and yet again a great team has been produced. Congratulations and thanks should go to all the other candidates for having the guts to run. It is not an easy decision to make but each can take pride in their efforts.

Over the last week I have been repeatedly asked what it is like to be winding up. The reality is that there are still seven weeks to go before handing the keys over to Seamus on the 1st July. There are still issues such as the case against the Law Society; the proposed University Legislation; the Community Clean-up scheme; the new Student Centre to consider, not to mention observing that the new repeats policy works according to plan.

Even more importantly, the issue of the handover period is uppermost in my mind. Due to various unfortunate events the task of ensuring a good link between the outgoing and incoming sabbatical officers has been somewhat neglected. The constitution states that the last two weeks of June should be spent "in tandem" with the incoming and outgoing officer working side by side. The process should go beyond this to allow the incoming officers the best possible start to their year. The aim this year will be to avoid the new officers having to re-invent the wheel. It is the outgoing officers responsibility to create an environment where the general workings are second nature so that the new team can concentrate on the specific tasks that they have put on the agenda. The summer is a busy time and the job can be made that bit more manageable with a productive period of co-operation.

## Colleges to Curb Sexual Harassment

"We're in the process" that was the response of the University of Limerick to the question of whether they were going to implement guidelines on how to deal with sexual harassment within the college; when they were asked the question by a report in the Examiner last week.

But the question is, does UL need a code addressing sexual harassment, well UCD certainly think so, last week

they circulated a letter to its 2,500 staff informing them of their new code.

This detailed that staff were told, brushing against a student, suggestive remarks and unnecessary touching could be regarded as inappropriate behaviour and could result in disciplinary action including dismissal or expulsion.

So does UL need to bring in legislation to curb the numerous 'A for a lay' stories that circulate around the college, or is

it a lucky perk of getting on well with a certain lecturer or tutor. With an alleged case of sexual harassment in the Munster region pending, perhaps the University should cover their liabilities and implement legislation before they are dragged into the dock to defend an alleged sexual harassment, for certainly, the college is lagging behind in this area as other Munster colleges such as Tralee RTC and Cork RTC have already got proposals set in place.

### University of Limerick "Political & Economic Review"

On Tuesday 7th May, a wine reception was held in Cafe Allegro for the launch of a new annual UL publication - the "Political and Economic Review". Mayor Jim Kemmy officiated at the launch. The review is produced entirely by students with the financial backing of the University, Andersen Consulting, Fitzpatrick's Associates Bank of Ireland and O'Mahony's book shop. It contains 17 essays (chosen out of almost 50 submitted) written by students on topics of economic and political relevance. Up until now Trinity has been the only Irish University with a journal of this kind. The review will be on sale Wednesday 8th, Thursday 9th and Friday 10th May in the canteen between 1 - 3pm at the bargain price of £2. Be sure to get a copy!

Paul Conneely and Davnet Cassidy  
Editors

## LAW EXEMPTIONS CASE

It has been some weeks since last I reported on the ongoing saga of the law exemptions ( or lack of same ) so this bulletin aims to bring you up to date on the happenings of the past while.

The case first went to court some four weeks ago and very little was discussed before an adjournment was granted for two weeks. Back we went then on Monday 29th of April to restart proceedings only to find that the defense have opted to put up a full argument and have requested more information on the plaintiffs, the end result. Another two week adjournment.

This brief summary brings us to the present. At the time of writing there is a meeting of all law students who signed up to support the court case scheduled for Wednesday 8th in the Donagh O' Malley theatre. There is a questionnaire being faxed to the Students' Union on Tuesday and each signatory to the case must complete one of these for forwarding to the defendants.

The case is up for hearing again on the 13th of May and we can only hope that this silly pattern of adjournments is

halted and that the exemptions are re-instated for the sake of fairness.

***There is a questionnaire being faxed to the Students' Union on Tuesday and each signatory to the case must complete one of these for forwarding to the defendants.***

there is a political route to getting the exemptions back which is currently being pursued by ACLET ( Advisory Council on Legal Education and Training ). Extra pressure brought to bear politically could help this alternative approach greatly and double our chances of getting the exemptions back. The key figure here is the Minister for Justice and you should urge your local politicians to support our cause in the Dail.

That is all for now except to say that expectations are still high as regards the possibility of getting these exemptions back and the campaign will continue on into the Summer. Information on the Status of the case can be had from the Students' union at any time for those interested in mapping it's progress throughout the holidays.

In the meantime we would urge all interested law students to put some pressure on their respective T.D.'s as

Damian.

# Artsing Around

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## Limerick Irish Film Festival a Major Success

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Over the course of the last few months you have read much about the lead up to Limerick's 2nd Irish Film Festival. Well by now it has come and gone. So how exactly did it go?

By all accounts the festival was a tremendous success. Audiences were up on last year and the response to the screenings were overwhelmingly favourable. Of the features screened (which covered a wide spectrum of Irish film past and present), it was the more contemporary independently produced films that attracted the

largest audiences. The opening night saw a capacity crowd fill screen one of the Savoy (and subsequently Henry's Bar until late that night), for Martin Duffy's debut feature "The Boy From Mercury". Other features to score highly with Limerick audiences were "Korea", "Guiltrip" and the closing film "Frankie Starlight".

Other outstanding aspects of the festival were the seminars on the Saturday in the Belltable Arts Centre; "Independent In Mind" and "Heineken Rock On Film". The "Eurofilm Short Film Programme" that evening, was in

this reviewer's opinion the best ever programme of contemporary Irish Short Films ever assembled at any festival.

As with any good feast the best wine was saved until last (and I'm not referring to the copious quantities of free Coopers at the closing party!), with the Open Forum on Sunday afternoon. Under the title "Irish Film - The Virtual Reality", there ensued a lively and vigorous debate on the current state of the film industry in this country. It certainly was an invigorating experience to watch some of the most prominent figures in the

industry getting to the very core of where Irish Film presently stands and where it should be going from here on. That this can take place in Limerick perhaps of itself adds some validity to the suggestion by one well known member of the audience that the Irish Film Board should be moved to this very city.

That about says it all, except to pay tribute to all of those who made the event possible; the organisers, the sponsors, the contributors, the audience and of course UL for starting it all in the first place.





# Welfare

## Drug Awareness Essay Winner

Below is the winner of the Drug Awareness Competition sponsored by Campus Bookshop, organised by the Student Counsellors. It is written by Jenepher Parry, a humanities student.

To E

or

Not to E

To be  
To wee  
To pee  
To see  
To me  
To be me

To cry  
To die  
To pot  
To rot

To be me **NOW**

## Optical Illusions

Troy was feeling very dizzy as he walked down the main street. He hadn't eaten in a week and he had no desire to throw fuel into his body. Any moment now his consciousness would walk away from him. He smiled and then everything went black.

He woke up with the scent of ether and that fresh starch linen smell running up and down his nostrils. Euch! He hated the smell of hospitals, it always made him violently sick. How the hell did he end up in this Godforsaken place? His mind was reeling through the clouds. Was this just another bad dream? He pinched himself to see where he really was. Ouch, reality stood there and slapped him in the face. His breath quickened from the shock and from that awful sense of claustrophobia. He had to get out of this place to breathe, to live to die. Suddenly, he wanted to scream at the top of his lungs and let all those obscenities, that abuse and frustration out. But he couldn't, he was paralysed,

numbed.

His mind was running through the rain at the speed of light. Plans for his escape were forming. He lifted the sheets off his skeleton and peered down at his body. Phew, at least there was something covering his nudeness.

**"How the hell did he end up in this Godforsaken place? His mind was reeling through the clouds."**

He looked at his arms and saw along with the needles all the hocked, pocked, scarred marks. Now don't jump to conclusions. Troy is not a drug addict. He just let his bad habits get out of control. You know yourself what's like when you lose all control over your sanity.

It took him only two minutes to rip the life supporting demons from his arms. His adrenaline pulsing through his veins lifted his skeleton from the bed. He was ready now to fly far away into the next world. And so he did, he ran down the empty hospital corridor. He ran so fast, laughing all his adrenaline away. The poor boy, he's been running ever since!

The End

Mrs. Pink.

# UL staff Union vote for industrial action!

or not, it resulted in throwing a spanner in the works for both parties. The Personnel department only succeeded in stopping one of the motions which ultimately still means some form of industrial action. MSF on the other hand while successful in one ballot are also taking issue to the memo sent on the day of the ballot and is something that will no doubt arise again in the near future. So with industrial relations so bad between Staff and authorities where from now?

The official MSF line now is, that initially there was a breach of a conciliation reached between management and staff which has resulted in this return to industrial action. They have been given a mandate to take further action on one issue and

have already instructed its members to do so. As and from May day there has been a non-co-operation with one UL department. As the ballot was so evenly split it is unlikely that staff will go on strike over this issue and MSF have stated that they would go back to its members if such a need presented itself. However there does seem to either be an impasse or a misunderstanding.

MSF have said that they want to sit down at a negotiation table but management will not sit down with them because of the industrial action already taken by MSF. Head of Personnel however has said that management will sit down and talk with MSF without hesitation as this he claims is their policy. If this is the case then why is there this apparent misunder-



ABOVE: Voting during the ballot last week

Below : Scenes from the last strike in UL



standing. Perhaps the Head of Personnel could employ his time more productively through dialogue with the MSF representatives rather than monologue (through memo) with every staff member. This not only wastes

precious paper materials and resources (an issue close to the Personnel managers heart) but also leads to misunderstandings such as the present one. We have two parties each of whom claim they will talk to each

other yet they still haven't. With exams fast approaching and industrial unrest growing this is no time to play stalemate chess, as the pawns sacrificed at the end of the day will be students.

# Poetry

## *A Whoppin Great Pain In The Head*

I've a pain in me noggin.  
The pain, it just keeps a-  
knockin.  
Efforts in vain :  
Can't ease the pain.  
What's goin' on in me brain?

Peter Sutcliffe  
1996 Scampi (Publishing) LTD

## *Dustbins on Wheels*

Big green ones, little black  
ones,  
Open the lid, peer inside,  
6 month old tomato sand-  
wiches,  
snat ridden tissues,  
the canteen special,  
3 cat carcasses,  
and a mould slice of corned  
beef.

## *Small But Nutritious*

ever swallow a midget  
ke of course  
omatically think  
e to puke it up  
ve gotten all my  
today  
a cheap meal !!

s Pink.

your heart  
ext to mine,  
carass it

## *What I Want*

I wanna be an author  
And have people read my books,  
I wanna be a model  
And have people like my looks.  
I wanna get elected -  
Be everyone's Main Man;  
I won't be very able  
But I'll do the best I can.

I...

I wanna be the teacher  
Who gives "A's" to all his class,  
I wanna be the priest  
Who fills his church for mass.  
I wanna thousand hugs  
And each of them sincere,  
From a thousand different people  
Who will never disappear.

I wanna...

I wanna say "I love you"  
And hear you say it too,  
I wanna have a hand to hold  
And it belong to you.  
I wanna be loved by women:  
Be their sun, stars and moon,  
I wanna be Don Juan De Marco -  
He never comes too soon!

I wanna be...

I wanna be a rock star  
And have people sing my songs,  
I wanna end world hunger  
And set right all life's wrongs.  
I wanna be acknowledged  
As the greatest guy on Earth  
And have the entire planet  
Convinced about my worth.

I wanna be loved...

I wanna be loved by you  
For the person who I am,  
I wanna have you know my faults  
And still not give a damn.  
I wanna be a pauper,  
Who owns nothing but his heart,  
Yet have you think me rich enough  
That we never live apart.

I...I wanna...I wanna be...  
I wanna be loved.

Matt Hamilton

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# MATHS LECTURERS

Dear Editor,  
I would like to thank the Personnel Department of this University on their inspired choice of Maths lecturers. My only question would be "What is the criteria for being a maths lecturer in U.L.?" I feel that the requirements are;

- Unintelligible handwriting on Overhead Projectors
- A speed limit of 25 acetates per hour
- The ability to talk about something totally irrelevant to the lecture
- Some strange colonial dialect of English (we are not all cast members of Braveheart, you know!)
- Have an average age of 94.6 years
- Not being able to tell the time, I remember when lectures finished at ten to the hour not five past

To conclude, as a first year Business student, the thought of spending another three years in this place is isn't too bad but only if I can learn something from them.

Signed Quentin Currantino

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# PRESIDENT ELECT

College Court,

Dear Ed,

I would just like to sack in this note through your newspaper, to thank everyone who was involved in last week elections.

I would particularly like to thank the absolutely fabulous John Cotter and the most fantastic campaign team in the world - thanks lads. Finally thanks to everyone who took the time out to vote on Thursday. I look forward to serving you next year.

Seamha Doran  
President - Elect

# CEO ELECT

Dear Ed,

Just a note to thank the students who turned out to vote in the election, particularly of course those who voted for me as C.E.O! The numbers voting were up from last year and it is heartening to see more students showing interest in their union. My gratitude also goes out to those who helped me with the campaign especially Ruth Scott, top radio D.J. and my campaign manager.

All of the candidates in the election put a lot of time, effort and a surprising amount of money into their campaigns. Congratulations on having the commitment and iron balls needed to run in such an election.

I am already working on the issues I outlined in my campaign and I will visit classes early next year to let them know what develops over the summer.

I am greatly looking forward to the year as C.E.O. and congratulations to this years officers Brian, Lorna and Duncan for doing an excellent job.

Thank-you again,

Sincerely,  
Conor Cronin

# A Thank You Note

Dear Ed,

I'm writing to thank everybody who voted and those who helped me during the elections,

especially Declan, Gaz, Jan, Sinead, the Chickie-chickie babes (Teresa, Emer and Jean), Matt, Katharina, Tim, Joanne, Foxy, Sham, Fluffy, Rialty, Karen, Marcus, Colm, Mad Billy, Big John, Paddy, Paudie, John, Mage, Mark sorry if I've forgotten anyone you were all brilliant

Thank you very, very, very much for everything especially the Tequila! If any of you decide to run in the future give us a shout (Foxy) and remember you'll always have a place to stay in Dublin Once again thanks for everything and keep in touch!!!

Bye-bye.

Keith

PS. Thanks to everyone who helped during the year too (Rag week, Class reps and debating etc.) I won't start that list you know yourselves.

# OPINIONS

## PITY THE FOOLS

If you lose an election you're not supposed to criticise the result. Anything more than a "the people have spoken - the bastards" type comment, smacks of sour grapes or bad sportsmanship. Yet, there is something very worrying about this year's elections that should be raised. Even if the people raising it are those on the losing side.

Talk of "cosy cartels" and "union tickets" abounded during the campaign and it wasn't difficult to see which candidates were being targeted by such attacks. Even a cursory glance at the campaign teams would show that certain candidates attracted strong support from individuals who have been active in the union for the past year or more. Fundamentally disturbing however, was how easily large sections of the electorate swallowed the line that there had to be something suspect about this.

Those that really believed this at the time of polling should consider a few points.

Firstly, all union members are entitled to vote in sabbatical elections and, as such, able to endorse and campaign for the candidates they feel to be the best qualified. The fact that someone has had prior involvement in the union is not grounds to deprive them of their full democratic rights.

Secondly, let's set the record straight as to who or what this "cosy cartel" actually is. It's easy to dismiss those involved in the union with such a term. They are, after all quite small in number and generally get on quite well with each other. Yet, any notion of a cartel implies that this group has some agenda that runs contrary to student's interests. This is not only wrong, it is also deeply insulting to the people who have been grafting hard on behalf of those making the accusations.

In a sense it's analogous to a man walking by the river and witnessing a woman drowning. He immediately jumps in and rescues her. No sooner than he has dragged her to the safety of the bank than he is assaulted by the woman's boyfriend and told "never put your arms 'round my woman again."

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ed by the woman's boyfriend and told "never put your  
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The same logic applies to the whole "union ticket"  
argument. By voting against individuals for the reason  
that they were "union" candidates people were effective-  
ly saying they don't appreciate the work that has been  
done on their behalf. That it doesn't matter that they  
themselves wouldn't need, backed a student centre they  
wouldn't be around to benefit from and raised sponsor-  
ship for events that others enjoyed. That it doesn't mat-  
ter that the rights and interests of the whole student body  
had been served, of then without reward or thanks, by  
this same small group. No, what matters was that these  
people were a "cartel" and that by definition something  
fishy had to be going on. After all, no-one really does all  
that stuff for other people without there being something  
in it for them. There just has to be ulterior motives.

And so it was that it was deemed inconceivable that  
"union" people were backing certain candidates out of  
genuine concern that the most able individuals got elect-  
ed. No, it must have something to do with maintaining  
influence. Keeping the cartel in charge.

The trouble with such thinking, beyond that it's erro-  
neous and a lousy way to make voting decisions, is that  
it alienates those who have been the lifeblood of the  
union's success for the last couple of years. If they feel  
that they are not wanted, then, like the man by the river,  
they may be a lot slower to dive in in future.

To all those who voted in order to "get the cartel out"  
a question: What the hell are you going to do if they all  
really do leave ?

Matt Hamilton.

Billy Madden.

# THE AUTHOR - A SHORT STORY

I wanted to tell her that I was lonely. More than anything, I wanted to tell her that I was lonely. I told her that I was happy.

The "her" in question has just left the room. I suppose I'm getting ahead of myself, though. To introduce myself first: my name is Séan Doyle, I'm 35 and I get paid for putting my ideas on paper - I'm a writer. Quite a good one too. Good enough to be able to admit that I'm talented. I'm no longer embarrassed about saying that, though most people assume I should be.

I suppose, however, it's about time I began to worry about other people's opinions. Before last week it didn't really matter. But now everything I do or say seems to interest people. It's amazing what a nomination for a literary award can do. The book I wrote didn't become any better after the nomination. Yet as soon as a panel of five international judges said they liked it, I was reading about myself as an heir to Synge, Pearse and Beckett. Yea, I laughed too!

It's amusing to see how people's opinions are so easily lead. Most of those proclaiming me as a literary genius have never read a word I've written. Or intend to. A lot of them probably would hate my stuff. Or even fail to understand it. But so long as they hear my work to be "Internationally Acclaimed" they'll toddle off to Easons, count it amongst their shopping and then give it to someone else who "likes that sort of thing."

Anyway, I'm digressing. Back to the "her" in question. I'd never been interviewed before, so I was quite apprehensive when my publisher, John Boyd, told me he'd arranged for a journalist to "swing by for a chat." I've always mistrusted John as he's far too prone to using euphemism's, particularly about money. The word "chat" adopted very ominous proportions when he used it. "Relax, Séan, she's a very sympathetic interviewer. You'll enjoy talking to her."

The annoying thing is that he was right. I think I would have been a lot more comfortable if he wasn't. If I'd been faced with a six foot gorgon whose mouth dripped acid every time she asked me a question at least she'd be something like what I expected. So I really objected to the fact that Caroline was young, friendly and good looking. I just wasn't prepared for anything vaguely pleasant.

I felt very vulnerable during the time we spent together. I resented the fact that I was attracted to her. It gave her an unfair advantage. I'm either tongue tied or gushing when talking to attractive women. The former is totally useless in an interview, the latter potentially dangerous. So I made sure to tread very carefully.

After half an hour I began to care less about the consequences of John reading that I considered him a "miserly git" and more about what it would be like to undo the buttons of Caroline's blouse. I felt as if her perfume was alcohol. The more I had of it, the looser my tongue. I told her things that I know now I'm going to regret. Yet, it's what I didn't tell her that is the source of my current discontentment.

I've often found it fascinating how our lives can pivot on the smallest of things. Or fail to pivot. It was half way through the interview that my life failed to pivot. I remember not just the question, but how her soft Derry accent caressed each word and how her lips smiled as she asked it. "So, where do you get your inspiration from?"

I leaned back in my chair. I hate writing that because I always seek to be novel - if you don't express your individuality what the hell's the point of being an individual? - but lean back in my chair is what I did. I wanted to give a good answer to this question. I don't mean an answer that newspaper readers would enjoy, I couldn't care less about them. No, I wanted an answer that would move the woman in front of me. I wanted her to understand me.

I wanted to tell her that just then the thing most inspiring to me was the long shafts of gold that occasionally dislodged themselves from behind her right ear to slowly fall before her eyes. I wanted to tell her that it's always been like this, that my inspiration is forever rooted in my desire for different women. More than that I wanted to tell her that I write because I'm lonely. I write because no-one knows how lonely I am and writing means I can tell the world how I feel. Without having to tell the world how I feel.

That's the thing about writing - you can hide behind the characters you create. I've been madly in love with women who have hurt me very deeply and I've never told them. And yet, everything that I have wanted to say to them, both in love and in bit-



teness, I have said to thousands of people, using my characters as mouthpieces.

Loneliness is the most difficult emotion to talk about. Almost by definition - if you're feeling it then you've probably got no-one to talk to. I get around this problem through writing. My books are filled with lonely people who talk about their loneliness. When I'm very depressed and feel like killing myself I opt for the safer alternative of killing one of my characters. Normally the one who most resembles me.

It's undoubtedly a very self-destructive thing to do - compel someone that you've created, who speaks your words and feels your feelings, to kill themselves. Yet, I've always found it very therapeutic. It's also kept me alive.

Well, perhaps. I'm not exactly sure. I've thought about suicide a lot but have never really believed I'd go through with it. I don't think that I'm that selfish. Or ungrateful. I've been blessed with talent, intelligence and health. So many people don't know how lucky they are - sight, hearing and mobility taken for granted. But I've always know that I've been lucky.

Appreciating my good fortune, I always tried to make the most of the best and most ephemeral of gifts - youth. To kill myself while I was young seemed unforgivable. And then, there was my mother. My death would have destroyed her. To do that to her after all her love and sacrifice is about the greatest evil I can think of.

But now I'm not so young and my mother is dead. And I'm still lonely. So maybe killing myself through metaphor is all that's keeping me going. I don't know. Perhaps Caroline would have been able to tell me. If I'd allowed my life to pivot.

I leaned forward in my chair. "Where do I get my inspiration from? Oh, from lots of things. But then, that would be telling!"

Matthew Hamilton