

Introduction

Waves (2016) is an arts education initiative that connects young people, contemporary art and the political. It includes a series of artist-led workshops, an associated film, and a text and design commission. *Waves* has seen compelling Irish artists Clodagh Emoe, Sean Lynch, Ruth Lyons and Eoghan Ryan devise a series of workshops for second level students in response to the rich context of the 1916 centenary. During this enquiry students and teachers from Fingal Community College and Hartstown Community School have explored ideas of zeitgeist, civic agency, collaboration, collectivity, public art, memorialisation and cultural representation. Videographer Jenny Brady has documented these dynamic investigations and the resulting film is now available to view online.

Composed by Distinctive Repetition, this graphic poster serves as a tribute to the project's participants, and shares another significant element – a newly commissioned text piece by writer Sue Rainsford. Created with a young audience in mind, this text resonates with themes encountered throughout the workshops. Together, the *Waves* programme and publication use the 1916 centenary as a departure point for active and creative engagement with the contemporary world.

Waves is a partnership programme between **Fingal Arts Office** and Cleo Fagan, curator of **Superprojects** – an initiative for young audiences that generates possibilities for creative encounters with contemporary art and artists. *Waves* is funded by Fingal County Council as part of the Fingal 1916 centenary programme.

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Disperse by Sue Rainsford

Something new comes into the world when pen is put to paper. An idea, a thought or feeling has been brought outside the smoky, whispery chamber of the mind. This is not to say that everything that gets written feels new or inspired, but it will always be original because it's been coloured by the particular experience of that particular author.

When the writer writes, she can't help but give something of herself away: perhaps through her use of certain phrases, the tilt of her handwriting, or the colour of the ink she chooses. She is committing to paper not only her thoughts, but glimpses of the mind they took root in.

We can ask the same questions of writing that we ask of most things:

What?
Why?
How?

The first two mostly take care of themselves. The 'what' is something that strikes the writer as important (because it's remarkable, unsettling or simply curious) and the 'why' is because important things need to be made manifest in the world.

The 'how' can be more troubling, but it gets less so when the writer embraces the fact that certain topics do not, in fact, require certain styles. You can write a poem about a painting; a critical essay about a dream. Often, the more seemingly mismatched a writing style and the chosen subject, the more surprising and rich the knowledge that their strange union provides. The knowledge that surfaces might be harder to quantify, to point at or underline, but it'll be a kind of knowledge no one else could have made.

There are signs hidden everywhere inside a text, telling us where to look or what to expect. This aspect of writing employs not only the dictionary definitions of words, but the feeling their sound can carry – much like the way a cinematic score leads us to suspect a character is falling in love, or will soon be in danger.

The letter 's', for example, can be soothing and calming:

...and the willows were stragglng their tresses in the water, and the cottonwood and the ash were making that late summer hush, that susurrus.¹

or it can be a serpentine hiss, a harsh warning:

She sipped her drink and the sun came sharp through the window. When she spoke her voice was syrupy. Too sweet.

This is one of the reasons that reading is so important for the writer: it's not only about collecting new words, but noting the various means we're prevailed upon to feel, suspect, dread, or seek out different happenings within the text.

One can go even further, and make the arrangement of the words or letters reflect the literal meaning:

d i s p e r s e

Approaching words in this almost mechanical, building-blocks kind of way means writing can be considered as a deeply physical process.

In 1899 Joseph Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, a book about travelling up the Congo River that details encounters with Africans along the way. Yedda Morrison, an artist and writer, took a copy of the book and removed with tippex everything bar allusions to the natural world. And so, *Heart of Darkness* became *Darkness*, and the book is no longer about exploring new territories (one of the most pressing concepts of Conrad's time), but about our natural world (one of the most pressing concepts of our time: our environment whose health is in such jeopardy). Not only has the actual book been changed, but its story and ideas have been subverted: gone now is the colonial gaze of the protagonist, the novel's arguably racist underbelly.

Mostly, when we look at a word as part of a story, an essay or a poem, we expect it to play its role alongside all the others in the text: it's supposed to help the narrative, argument or image unfold. Erasure poetry, this kind of writing that finds new or hidden meaning inside an existing piece, allows the writer to spend time with words in a different way. She can go into the page and pluck out what she perceives as the most pressing, the most evocative.

While on the surface this might seem a destructive act, the peeling back layers of meaning to reveal new or hidden stories is, in fact, hugely restorative. Forgotten meanings, or indeed meanings that have been willfully written out of history because they conflict with accepted narratives, can be brought to centre stage.

This kind of change is especially powerful when considered alongside documents and stories relating to our own lives, or our shared history. There are many topics, after all, that seem to have been squeezed dry of all meaning. A historical event such as 1916, for instance, might feel so dense and charged as to be untouchable: *anything one could possibly think about this has already been thought of by someone else*. Erasure poetry is one way of enacting change on such material, of allowing a personal interpretation to resonate within the constant bombast and thrum of history and commemoration. Even if this meaning seems obscure or strange, even if it offers only a glimpse of something larger, it serves you in leaving a trace of yourself behind.

¹ Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 2004.

Erasure poem of 1916 proclamation

men women
generations
receive children and
strike for freedom
secret Brother open
perfect
resolute
now seize
exile
in full
declare unfettered
ownership
usurp
extinguish
destruct
six times again
in arms
Pledge
of our comrades
equal
resolve and cherish,
invoke
valour
this sacrifice
prove worthy to it s
call