



Fathers Bereaved by 'Death Without Birth'

To augment my series on feminism, this is a related article I wrote four years ago, after a ruinous Irish referendum on abortion, with an added 2022 coda concerning the deep nature of media corruption



John Waters
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One of the more commonplace — and irksome — arguments that crops up in relation to abortion is that it is a matter on which only women should have a voice. Even if we are to take this argument on its own reductive 'gender' terms, an obvious question arises: May anyone speak on behalf of the male 50 per cent of those human creatures whose existences are snuffed out by abortion?

But there is another unspoken category of overlooked humans here also: the might-have-been fathers of those obliterated children. It is noticeable that, when this issue is referred to at all in these discussions, it usually gets disposed of in the conventionally censorious terms our society has contrived to dispose of fathers: "Oh, he won't be seen for dust", *et cetera. et cetera.* Just as self-styled 'liberals' use hard cases to bludgeon problematic principles, they also like to advance worst-case caricatures to disallow the claims of inconvenient parties whose involvement might complicate things more than liberals like (a pretty low threshold, generally speaking).

But imagine a 19 year-old boy, perhaps your son, brother or nephew, who "gets" his 18-year-old girlfriend pregnant. The pregnancy is unplanned, i.e. in conventional terms

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But let's imagine that the woman has not quite made up her mind. She is taking her time with the decision. This, we insist, is her prerogative entirely. The man — the putative father of the child-in-the-balance — has no entitlement to speak for himself or his would-be son or daughter. He waits to hear the fate of his child.

In that period of uncertainty, what is to be his disposition? He may be about to become a father or he may not. Indeed, in his own mind he may already be a father, but this is something he will be well advised to keep to himself.

Western societies increasingly take the following view: If his child is allowed to live, this man must be available, for the rest of his life, to love and provide for his child — emotionally, materially, psychologically, and in manifold other ways. He will be expected — by the mother, her family and friends, and by society in general — to step up to the plate and become a loving, caring and responsible father. He will also be expected to live his life thenceforth as if these days or hours of indecision and mulling-over have never occurred — as if the idea of obliterating his child had never been considered. From the moment his child is delivered from the threat of the abortionist's knife, he must locate in himself the qualities of love, devotion, duty and protectiveness that society feels entitled to demand from a father while implacably refusing him the legal basis from which to protect his child.

If, on the other hand, it is decided that his child is to be destroyed, he should be able to go about his life as if nothing has happened, *as if he never had a child, the prospect of a child, even the thought of a child.*

You do not hear or read much in the media about male bereavement by abortion, but it is nonetheless a real syndrome, documented in numerous academic studies. This research tells us that abortion causes many men to become emotionally overwhelmed, to experience disturbing thoughts, feelings of grief and loss. They react either by silence or hostility.

Reviewing how abortion impacts intimate relationships, Coleman, Rue & Spence (2007) reported that men tend to exert greater control than women over the expression of painful emotions, and so tend to internalise grief, and cope alone. The study also found that men are inclined to identify their primary role as providing support for their 'partners,' even after an abortion — even if they have opposed the decision to abort. That study also revealed that men are more likely than women to experience feelings of despair long after the abortion, and are accordingly more at risk of suffering chronic grief.

Another study, (Coyle, 2007) found that men whose children have been aborted experience feelings of grief, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, helplessness, powerlessness, and other feelings akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and that they tend to repress these feelings rather than expressing them. PTSD symptoms, which manifest in two in five men implicated by abortion, can take an average of 15 years to manifest in men thus affected. Some studies (Coleman & Nelson, 1998; Kero & Lalos, 2000; Lauzon et al, 2000; Mattinson, 1985) have found evidence that some men grieve more than the mother following the loss of an unborn child, giving the lie to conventional notions about the male as emotionally disconnected from his child. In fact, a great number of men experience abortion as the actual death of a child. Such feelings are frequently exacerbated by the man's inability to understand what the woman expects of him, as many women in these situations experience ambivalent feelings which cause them to emit contradictory and confusing messages. Due to the relentless propaganda that attends such matters, many men assume that their role is to 'support' the woman even when he disagrees with the decision to abort, whereas in truth the woman may secretly wish for the father to talk her out of killing the child.

I wonder: in the event that his child is not permitted to live, at what precise moment is the father expected to extinguish in himself the love, duty, affection and devotion that would

have been required to parent a living child — qualities and responses demanded of the father by society, even though the same society simultaneously forbids him to have any say in the matter?

Or, conversely, if the child is given the green light, does the father's responsibility to ignite in himself the various qualities that are expected of a good-enough father begin from the moment of the announcement of the baby's reprieve? Or is such a suddenly incorporated father entitled to a period of time to initiate the process of ignition in himself? If so, how long might he have to do this?

Of what do we imagine a man is made?

Does modern Western society imagine that its young males come equipped with some hidden mechanism for use when their children are annihilated — when, having been briefly invigorated with the possibility of fatherhood, they find that the emotions normally called upon in this context are not needed? Or, on the other hand, do we — collectively, I mean — believe that a man who has started in himself the process of grieving his child should be able to arrest this movement of evolution within himself, and behave as though his child had not been temporarily under sentence of death by 'its' mother, but merely had a miraculous recovery from some kind of life-threatening illness?

What kind of men might such a society expect to produce? Automatons with switches secreted in various regions of their bodies for turning on and off their human passions and emotions? Or — if flesh-and-blood males with real human desires, affections and capacities — what might we expect to happen to the hearts of men under such a regime?

Would a society such as ours be entitled to be surprised if it ended up producing male humans who were incapable of loving, or grieving, or telling the difference between?

Coda, 2022

Many years ago, I had multiple media dealings with a guy called Eamon Dunphy, a former footballer who, after a brief stint with Manchester United, had ended up playing for some number of years with Millwall in the second division, picking up a few caps for Ireland along the way. In the early 1980s, having returned to live in his native Dublin, he began pursuing a career as a journalist, within a short time emerging as one of the brightest stars in the firmament of Dublin print media. At the time gaining the approval of the 'mercurial' (the usual cliché) would-be media tycoon, Vincent Browne, he became a regular contributor to two of Browne's publications, the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper and the monthly current affairs magazine, *Magill*.

Dunphy was a remarkably good writer, expressing himself in simple, clear, often fiery sentences, and was knowledgeable not just about football but about sport in general and in particular about the competitive instinct radiating outwards from the idiom of sport as a metaphor for human endeavour. It is important to stress that he was not just some sporting deadbeat, but an exceptionally talented writer, who wrote truthfully and courageously about any matter before him, and got himself into no end of trouble on that account. He ran afoul of several of Ireland's leading luminaries at the time by writing blistering profiles of them, which sometimes touched on the border of malevolence. In 1990, having criticised the Irish football team, then under the management of the former English World Cup medal-winner Jack Charlton, he ended up with a battalion of Irish fans battering on the roof of his car as he attempted to leave Dublin airport on the way home from covering the World Cup in Italy. Later he wrote about the incident, describing breaking down in tears on the Rosslare to Cherbourg ferry, as he headed to France to escape the national madness. 'I'd been putting a brave face on it for several weeks, pretending not to give a fuck. The tears told a different story.'

When I was working as a magazine editor in the mid-1980s, he had occasionally — after much harassment on my part — agreed to write articles for me. He was likeable, a constant ferment of mixed energy, and also erratic and capricious in his loyalties and obsessions. He had a way of 'adopting' people and becoming their unappointed advisor and mentor, instructing them in how they ought to handle themselves and what they should be doing with their lives. He started to do this with me, until our friendship came to a sudden halt after a series of events that culminated in a string of articles by him in which he not merely engaged in nasty personalised attacks, but on one occasion gave an account of some personal dealing between us that was so removed from the facts that I was forced to take legal action against his then newspaper, *The Sunday Independent*. The case went almost literally to the doors of the court before the *Sindo's* lawyers, having scrutinised the evidence I had produced showing that Dunphy had rearranged a sequence of events to imbue them with a spurious malign meaning, the newspaper capitulated and paid me damages and legal costs in an amount approaching six figures — in 1997 a considerable sum.

Strangely, or perhaps not, we later patched things up and became (sort of) friendly once more. He started doing an afternoon current affairs radio show, *The Last Word*, on the independent national radio channel, Radio Ireland — subsequently Today FM — which really was exceptionally good. Dunphy's 'secret' was that he genuinely liked to have good arguments, and knew that the public was, generally speaking, similarly disposed. Most days he would interview politicians and suchlike concerning the news of the day; but, sometimes, without ceremony, he would drop everything and devote an entire two-hour programme to a single topic/interviewee, or completely opt out of the news agenda for perhaps an hour to give time and space to more in-depth exploration of an issue no one else was covering. He gave platforms to alternative and awkward voices, including many people he personally disagreed with, thereby forcing other media to follow suit. He wore his own internal evolutions on his broadcasting sleeve — for example, changing his position on Sinn Féin, after years of excoriating political violence, coming to applaud the movement's leaders for their part in the Northern Ireland peace process. In this and other matters, he exhibited great personal courage in pointing out what needed pointing out.

Around 2000 or so, filling in as radio columnist for the *Irish Times*, I wrote a positive review of *The Last Word*, after which Dunphy and his producers invited me to come on the show to talk about fatherhood and family law. On that occasion, he apologised publicly for his previous attacks on me, and I accepted his apology. Later on, when he moved to the early morning slot on Newstalk FM, I would come in a couple of times a week to review the papers or talk about something in the news. We also made a series of appearances together as co-panellists talking about major political events (with another journalist, Eoghan Harris) on the *Late Late Show*. We kept each other at a distance, but there was a renewed if guarded sense of respect and even fondness. What I liked about Dunphy was that, for all his extremism and unreliability, he appeared to have strong convictions and to believe passionately in freedom of speech, often deciding to cover particular stories for the very simple reason that no one else was. He was volatile, capricious, fickle, with a predilection for stirring things. But there was also a, yes, tenderness to him that made him strangely likeable. He was difficult to dislike and easy to forgive — once, anyway.

In 2013, introducing an interview I did with him to promote his autobiography, *The Rocky Road*, I wrote:

There's a quality about Dunphy that is all but unique in Irish journalism: what I would call the quality of affection. By this I don't mean loyalty or sentimentality, but something deeper. It has to do with how he decides about things, people, situations. There isn't a hint of ideology in his make-up. Every conviction of his has been filtered through his experience, emotions and basic instincts. Whereas most people claim to decide things on the basis of logic and empirical evidence, Dunphy acts on a combination of head, heart and gut. His responses are reasonable, but in a bigger, more extravagant way. If

sometimes he appears to be inconsistent, it's because he is . . .'

A referendum scheduled for May 2018, contrived to remove the Eight Amendment guarantee of the right-to-life of the unborn child in Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution, was perhaps the apogee of Irish journalism up to that point, with virtually every journalist in the country unabashedly putting the case for abortion and seeking to marginalise or demonise anyone who sought to put across a contrary opinion. Towards the end of what passed for the campaign, I appeared on Newstalk FM, in what was to be my final appearance on mainstream radio, to talk about the issues from a pro-baby standpoint. Dunphy was by now long gone, having fallen foul of the station's proprietor, who had come to regard him as a little too independent and allegedly objected to Dunphy having too many 'dissident voices' on his programmes.

My Newstalk interlocutor on this occasion was Ivan Yates, a former government minister turned media personality. Despite his history as a senior member of Fine Gael — the party pushing the referendum to abolish the rights of the unborn child — Yates, who has since retired from media, was among the straightest and fairest of those you might be likely to come up against in those days. (He quit at an early stage of the Covid debacle, having begun to issue a series of disgruntled and critical ruminations about the lack of sense that pervaded the whole affair.)

The interview went reasonably well and, at one point, Yates asked me the question all media presenters were at the time primed to pitch at any man who dared to question the logic or morality of abortion: *Did men have any right to even have an opinion?* I gave him, in reply, more or less the contents of the article above. Shortly after leaving the studio, I received a phone call from a man who told me that I had just told his story. He described a horrific series of events, in which his girlfriend, many years ago, had become pregnant and had unilaterally decided to have an abortion. He disagreed with the decision and said so. They argued but his girlfriend, coming under parental pressure, was adamant. In the end he failed to persuade, but nonetheless decided to stand by her, even accompanying her to the abortion clinic when the time came. He described driving her to the abortion clinic, pleading all the way, collapsing on the floor and seeing her walking upstairs to the slaughterhouse. While the abortion was underway, he prayed that a change might occur, but his prayers were not answered.

The most astonishing part of his story was that he had remained with this woman, and had subsequently married her. They had, he said, gone through '16 years of hell.' Together they had two more children. He had never, in all the subsequent years, been able to come to terms with this event.

He then asked me if I would do him a favour. Some time before, he said, he had written a letter to his unborn child, and wanted to know if I would try to find an opportunity to read it out in public. I agreed, telling him that I would try to find an opportunity to do it. He sent me the letter, which you can read below.

A short time later, I received a call from Eamon Dunphy, now doing his own podcast, on which I had appeared several times previously. Dunphy told me that he was a No voter but couldn't speak out because his children were for Yes and had sworn him to silence. He said he was disgusted by the media coverage and wanted to give the other side. He asked if I would do an interview with him; I could have, he said, the entire two hours to myself to set out the alternative point of view, by way of counterbalancing the total media blitzkrieg on the pro-abort side. He said that, since it was a podcast — these not being subject to the usual regulations about balance — I could have as much time as I needed to say whatever I wanted to say, the entire podcast if I wanted. I immediately agreed, and we went on to speak for some time about the issues and the corruption of journalism, at which he professed to be shocked and dismayed. He seemed especially interested in what I was saying about the referendum itself being unconstitutional on its face — because the right being attacked by it was anterior, antecedent, inalienable, imprescriptible,

indefeasible and 'superior to all positive law': Since Article 40.3.3 was merely the scripted iteration of something that existed naturally in permanent and eternal form, the wording could never be regarded as other than a mnemonic concerning something that had a life that was absolute — before, within, and beyond the walls of the Constitution. The wording could be deleted, yes, but the right to life could not.

The studio where Dunphy recorded his podcasts was on South William Street, in the centre of Dublin. We agree to meet beforehand at a nearby café, as was our wont on these occasions. On arriving in the café, he was in his normal ebullient form, but I instantly detected something odd in his manner. We engaged in some strained banter for a few moments and then he said something about 'Una' coming in afterwards. I immediately (mistakenly) took this to be a joke, intuiting (correctly) that he was referring to a woman called Una Mullally, whose unbelievably corrupt and disgraceful conduct had been one of the factors in my decision, four years earlier, to leave the *Irish Times* after 24 years. Mullally was a 'journalist' better known for being homosexual than for anything of value in her writing. I responded to Dunphy on the assumption that he was joking, but it soon emerged that he was not — that he had, counter to our agreement, allocated half of the podcast not merely to the other side of the debate but to someone who had gone out of her way to do me serious harm. He laughingly assured me that I would be permitted to leave the building before Mullally arrived.

Suddenly reminded of the fact that the last previous podcast we had done together — about media corruption — had been mysteriously scrapped by Dunphy, rather unpersuasively citing 'sound issues' as the reason, I ought to have pulled the plug there and then. But, not wanting to lose this opportunity to — as I hoped — set out the full truth of the criminal nature of what was afoot in the referendum, opted instead to cut my losses. I had spent the several days since Dunphy and I had spoken planning out how I was going to make best use of the opportunity. Even though he had a tiny audience I felt there was a chance of doing an interview that might go viral if I managed to hit the right notes.

One of the things I had decided was to use Briain's letter to his son, reading it out perhaps as a coda to the interview. On the short walk to the studio, I broached this topic with Dunphy, explaining that it might work best as something read at the very end and maybe they could splice it into the interview afterwards. I felt it would need a little imaginative framing, as it was one of those things you can't get a feel for until you try it, and I wasn't 100 per cent sure it would work. He was offhand about this, telling me I should talk to his technician. He also told me that he had just finally negotiated a sponsor for the programme, though he could not yet say who it was. It subsequently emerged as the multinational good retailers, Tesco. The various previous appearances I had made on Dunphy's podcast had been *pro bono*, which was never an issue for me, though Dunphy was forever saying that, once he got a sponsor, he would be able to pay people.

I walked ahead of Dunphy, up the stairs to the studio, and on arriving raised the issue of the letter with the technician, a youngish guy whom I had met in that context before and who had been polite but had not had much to say for himself. I made my request about Briain's letter, and he showed zero interest. By now I had a growingly bad feeling. This was not improved when, raising the issue of the letter again when Dunphy arrived after a visit to the bathroom, I caught him exchanging eye-rolling smirks with the technician, clearly oblivious that I have 180 degree vision. Again, I considered walking, but once more convinced myself that my duty to the issue involved staying and making the best possible use of the time. I felt confident that, once the interview kicked off, Dunphy would assume his normal interviewing posture — curious, interested and willing to allow his interlocutor to speak at more or less whatever length was required to get his argument across.

Instead, Dunphy turned into one of those interviewers he had for years excoriated as frauds and sell-outs. Rather than allowing me to set out my stall and then lead the discussion in the directions I wished to, he went in for the kill from the beginning. He started asking what to me seemed to me irrelevant questions about the political context of

the framing of the Eighth Amendment (otherwise Article 40.3.3) — being particularly insistent that I enter a discussion with him about Peter Sutherland, the attorney general who had presided over the framing of the amendment in 1983. It was one of those anorak questions that tend to be asked by people with a little historical memory but little grasp of actual issues, so as to conceal their ignorance and present themselves as 'well-researched.' I batted these questions, but, mindful that my time had already been cut in half, persistently tried to take the discussion back to where I wanted to begin: the fact that the right to life was an antecedent right under natural law and could not, therefore, be the subject of any vote of the Irish people. But Dunphy pummelled me with questions about what he insisted on calling the 'morning after pill' — a misspoken reference to a *cul de sac* issue that had arisen repeatedly in the referendum campaign, concerning the fact that abortions were increasingly being conducted by the use of prescribed abortion pills (a different matter to morning after pills) — and which, again, was not one of the issues he and I had discussed. His tone was belligerent and obstructive. I had been running the issues through my head for nearly a week since he and I had spoken, but now saw my time being eaten away with his timewasting irrelevancies, gamesmanship and dirty play.

Later, I would discover certain things that might have assisted me in coming to a pre-emptive decision to abort the interview: The technician, it turned out, had a 'Repeal the Eighth' banner on his social media feeds, and also worked with Una Mullally on regular pro-abortion podcasts. I also learned that, another pro-baby advocate, Maria Steen of the Iona Institute, had gotten a rough ride from the same two gentlemen a few months before.

Frustration built up because I had so many things to say and a rapidly diminishing amount of time to say them, even if I were allowed to. I looked out the window over Dunphy's shoulder, trying to focus on what I wanted to say. I heard Dunphy's cackling, pompous voice continuing with its disruptive and obstreperous line of questioning. A penny dropped: I had been useful to Dunphy for close on 20 years, always being prepared to come on his pilots and shows and podcasts, while he pretended to respect what I had to say even when he did not agree with me, blah blah; but now the balance of advantage had shifted in another direction, he was going with the flow. I realised that I was wasting my time, and in doing so betraying those potentially millions of babies whose very existence might depend on what I was able to express on their behalf. Something snapped, m'lud. I detected a red mist beginning to cloud up my vision. I stood up, explained to Dunphy that he was a 'fucking bollox,' and walked out.

Inevitably, within minutes, Dunphy was on to thejournal.ie, a poisonous Woke online publication which disgraces the name of journalism at least once with every minute of its existence. One of its 'reporters' rang me up and, stupidly taking the call, I gave him a full account of what had occurred, more or less as above. Of course, he published almost nothing of what I told him of the background to the episode and used the opportunity to paint me as a loose cannon who had failed to answer straightforward questions about the 'morning after pill.' The audio of me calling Dunphy a fucking bollox went viral, the State and its puppet Mullally chalked up a score, and Dunphy got his 15 minutes of free publicity. In a media culture that had ignored multiple public contributions of mine concerning the unlawful nature of the referendum itself, these two words of mine became one of the major talking points of the tail-end of the 'debate.' For months afterwards, Dubballin 'wits' would greet me in the street with the unvarying observation, 'I hear Dunphy is a bollox now' — to which I would respond: 'What's with the "now"?'

It is remarkable how a people from whose mouths every second word begins with an 'f' or a 'b' can get all sanctimonious about 'bad language' when lexical piety provides a way of avoiding thinking or talking about things they prefer to sing dumb about.

But still — I knew and know: I shouldn't have lost it like that. Even though most of the people on our side afterwards said it was about time someone called Dunphy out for what he was — *is* — I still feel ashamed on account of losing control. By doing so, I had given

the baby-killers on a plate what they wanted: the opportunity to create a burlesque by which to trivialise the arguments against the amendment.

More broadly, the meaning of this episode has to do, I submit, not merely with cynicism, ideological capture or 'media corruption,' but essentially with the corruption of idealism, the buy-out-sell-out of the last remnants of Irish democracy, and the descent into self-delusion that will shortly bring Ireland to depths of horror and sorrow not experienced since the period of the last genocide in the 1840s. It is, then, a story from the final days of Irish civilisation, or rather from the *final death rattles* of Irish civilisation, for this has been in train for some considerable time. It is a story of the ultimate and terminal unravelling of values and ethics that once had meanings, as the society hurtles headlong towards the cliff-edge of self-destruction.

The obscenity at the heart of the 2018 referendum episode relates not merely to the appalling idea that a people might claim legitimately to draw lots to determine when one or other of its number — or one or other *category* of its number — should live or die, but also to the idea that this has to do with a battle in which 'tradition' seeks to shackle 'progress.' The phrase used in the Irish language version of Article 40.3.3 was '*beo gan breith*' — literally, 'living without birth,' or 'alive though not yet born.' This phrase had been formulated in advance of a referendum held in 1983, but of course its conception derives from many centuries before that, from the moments of the birthing of the earliest thoughts of man in Ireland. It shows that, in the civilisation that long preceded this pseudo-progressive age, our forefathers — many centuries before the United Nations was heard of — had a clear sense of the meaning of fundamental human rights. '*Bás gan breith*,' on the other hand, might be the watchword for the dying civilisation we cling to now — translating as 'death without birth,' an extraordinarily apt summation of our collective condition.

Moreover, the delusional nature of where Ireland is allowing itself to be taken relates to the fatuous belief that a society will continue into a utopian future even when its numbers have become fatally depleted, and this as a matter of 'choice.' Of course, to describe this as a 'belief' is to flatter it mercilessly, since no one thinks about such things and the media refuses to permit their discussion.

Between 2011 and 2021, Ireland's birth-rate declined by something approaching one-quarter, and this refers to an all-encompassing figure, including vast numbers of aliens, lately arrived in Ireland and still manifesting the procreative patterns of their countries-of-origin, most of which are dramatically higher than those of any European country. The fertility rate in Ireland is now barely 1.1, which is to say about half what is required to sustain the population at its present level into another generation. In other words, the replacement of the Irish population — a 'conspiracy theory' of perennial journalistic scorn — has two arms: migration and fertility, and the two together make it virtually certain that the Irish will become a minority in their own country within three — or perhaps two — decades. One of the critical elements in this collapse will have been the introduction of abortion to Ireland in 2018.

The great irony is that all this obscenity of destruction and self-destruction is subject to the commonplace assertion that it has happened in the name of 'progress,' which overlooks that, without life, there is no 'progress,' no process of renewal, and therefore no future.

Once, not that long ago, it would have at least been possible to discuss such matters on a public forum, but not anymore. The Eamon Dunphy of old had long exhibited an interest in providing platforms to people prepared to advance unpopular or minority views on such issues. The experience detailed above demonstrates that this possibility of maintaining an oasis of awareness in the widening desert of media corruption had by 2018 ceased to exist — mainly due to cynicism, self-interest, ideological bullying, and corporate pieces of silver. This salutary story tells us something of the depths to which Irish society has fallen,

when someone who is known for his insistence on platforming unpopular ideas can be bought off by a few pounds of hairy Tesco bacon. In any event, the moment I left that studio, I was pulling the door shut on any hope that the mainstream media might retain the capacity to save us from the disaster we were already walking into.

Incidentally, or perhaps not, that interview I did with Dunphy five years earlier, concluded as follows:

[Dunphy] laments the drift of things in the present moment: austerity and what he calls 'the cancer of corporatism.' He thinks politics and journalism are becoming pointless and useless.

'There isn't a party you could join. There isn't a newspaper you could write for. No one is taking this fucking shit on. And RTE don't get it. So where are we? We're wandering in a wasteland, as journalists. Nowhere to write, nowhere to speak, sanitised . . . '

Have we failed?

'I don't think we've failed.' He pauses. 'It's a good question. I think when we look back from 100 years time, I think we'll see the age of free and trenchant journalism as a phase the world went through in the 20th century.'

An aberration?

'An aberration.'

Here, in conclusion, is the short letter Briain wrote to his son who lived for a short time — in the words of the Irish language of the Irish Constitution — 'without birth.'

[I subsequently kept my promise to Briain by reading out his letter to his dead son on a podcast interview with a friend who was outraged by the episode. This podcast would have attracted a small audience while it lasted, and, unfortunately, although the post is still to be seen on both Apple and Anchor podcasts, attempts to play it four years on have not met with success. Let this, then, be the fulfillment of my promise, made four years ago, to help this father honour the memory of the son he almost knew, who died at the hands of a mass murderer before his eyes had an opportunity to open on to this strange, troubling but beautiful world. Being uncertain what David and I agreed concerning identifying him and his family, I have altered or redacted the names of those referred to. 'Briain' is not the father's real name, but 'Briain' is much more than one man — he might, without exaggeration, be called Everyman.]

Letter to My Son

Can I ask you to keep interceding for us with our Father in heaven? Please help Cathal whenever he is in doubt and give him the confidence to allow him develop and fulfil his potential. Can you ask Our Lady to guide your wonderful sister May, and help her discover her vocation in life? You would have been so good for the both of them.

My big consolation is that Mammy would have been at the gates of heaven on that fateful day to welcome you and hold you tight. She would have been so proud introducing the 1st xxxxx to all the grandparents, cousins and friends that were taken up to heaven prematurely.

Tá brón agus díomá mór orm nach bhfuil tu anseo inniu. Slán agus Beannacht Dé leat, mo mhac Cormac.

Do Áthair, Briain

BTW Happy Birthday in a few weeks. Say hello to Mammy and Daddy. I miss them both.

John Waters Unchained is a reader-supported