

# Silence isn't golden in rude new Ireland

**D**EAR old Éire is suffering a charm drought. Stand at any shop counter nowadays and attempt to pay. Eyes will shift furtively; and with change barely checked, shrapnel coinage will land anywhere but in your outstretched hand.

Woody Allen-like, you'll silently protest — standing and staring back in the direction of the one-sided exchange. But your facial expressions will be rendered as obsolete as the art of handwriting.

We've lost our touch. The ageing rocker within the Irish psyche has been on one world tour too many: the drugs simply don't work anymore. Our opiate was friendliness but the buzz is gone.

Perhaps the technological revolution is to blame. Text-messaging freaks have a lot to answer for, but little to say. To compound matters, their unbothered behaviour is reflected by the non-language of their mutterings: a Hiberno-pidgin tongue. Where's the wit gone? This is not how public banter used to be. Those gadgets have robbed us of personality. Sadly, Ireland has become an alternative Stepford: a place horribly uniform in its rudeness.

Shops must have jumped into bed with the banks — and caught their impersonal virus. If only we'd all just hurry up and order our lives online. Until then, they'll all continue to be staffed by lost souls, anaemically engaging with you in a most nonplussed kind of way.

When were the good folk of this land issued with licences to treat each other with such an attitude of thinly-veiled contempt? Maybe it was when towns started to look the same, in a Celtic-tiger-meet-communism kind of prosperity. We got bored with ourselves, while getting stuck in each other's traffic jams.

We used to have a verbal prowess — conversational ping-pong came naturally.



**David Young**

## The Last Word

But now, the rarity of such exchanges would knock you off guard. You would drop your wallet or maybe even make another purchase, just to see if you'd imagined it.

There's nothing to be done but become the Dirty Harry of social protocol and goad counter staff into making your day. If they dare to challenge you by looking away, or unforgivably dispense with their side of the language bargain, the gloves are off.

Unleash a barrage of jabbering niceness; bobbing and weaving, assault their senses with "You're looking well ... shocking weather ... how's your father?" until the light comes on in their eyes. Smile gently. The effort may be memorable, but you might have to leave before the gardaí get there. It's amazing what has to be done to get a little courtesy these days.

