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# Editorial

*by Karin Petko*

“Oh, when I was young, things were so different...” We get to hear this sentence quite often. And indeed, things were different – better, if we are to believe the older generations. The world has supposedly taken a turn for the worse – who should then care about it, when you can spend your time reminiscing about - you all know it – “the good old days.” But why can we not have the good *young* days now? If the past was so great, why can’t the present be as well? It is the result of the past after all. Can we not take the good elements – yes, we need to be picky, because not everything was so perfect in the times gone by – from the past and combine them with what is great today? ENgLIST’s new team is trying to achieve exactly that by combining two previously successful elements with many young talents of the present: a thematic issue and a biannual publication as in the “good old days,” but conveying the written word of our contemporaries. The two might have been more like exceptions than a rule, but have proven to be successful regardless. Now, not only are you reading the brand new thematic issue, it is also merely the first of the two you will hold in your hands this academic year, with another one (our 20th!) following in May. But first, we bring you a special issue of ENgLIST on the topic of all things Irish. As you will see, our beloved authors have covered everything from mythology to politics, dealing with topics that reach as far back as the oldest of legends, thus coalescing the past and the present in a single issue. This serves to prove that without the past, we would have no present, yet without the present, there would be no use of the past. And without you, dear writers and readers, there would be no ENgLIST. Therefore, thank you for reading this, and while you are turning the pages of this issue do not be too critical and keep in mind that despite most of us on the team being new to our responsibilities, we tried our best to give you the finest conglomerate of what was, what is, and perhaps what will be. But that last one still has to be discovered and written.



# *Irish Gothic – the Monster and Its Victim*

*by Zala Jambrovič Hatič*

Reading some of the nineteenth-century gothic masterpieces and critiques thereof, one might think that critics have more or less discussed all there is to discuss about these chefs-d'œuvre. However, when considering the so-called monster stories, it quickly becomes obvious that not all victims are the same and not all of them receive the same treatment from the monster. There are two types of victims in the Irish Gothic – the average one, whom the monster does not even consider beyond their purpose as its means of survival, and the chosen few who lure the monster in without knowing or meaning to do so, because there is something about them that the antagonist simply cannot resist. Four great works of fiction from the nineteenth century shall be discussed in the following pages, all of them produced by authors of Irish descent: Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Before starting a discussion about monsters and their victims, however, it is necessary to first clarify what exactly “a monster” is. Anyone who has read the aforementioned novels and novella — and probably quite a few people who have not — will immediately be able to remark that two of the plots revolve around vampires while the other two describe pacts with the Devil. Although Dorian Gray does not knowingly trade away his soul, he explicitly wishes for the portrait to age in his stead and takes every advantage of that as soon as he realises that his wish somehow came true. Therefore, he shall be considered alongside Melmoth, who *does* knowingly make a pact with the Devil, exchanging his soul for a prolonged life and, more importantly, knowledge. However, neither of these characters is a monster in the traditional sense of the word — or are they? As Saler and Ziegler point out, the word “monster” is used in many different ways in contemporary English (220). They draw attention to David Gilmore:

[David Gilmore] finds that monsters typically exhibit a constellation of features: great size and/or remarkable strength; a prominent mouth with fangs or some other means of facilitating predation on humans; an urge to

consume human flesh and/or blood; and hybridism, for they often combine human and animal features, or mix living and dead tissue, or manifest amalgams of discordant parts of various organisms. (Saler and Ziegler, 220)

More or less the same was established by David Williams in *Deformed Discourse*, but does that automatically mean that body deformation is requisite for someone to be labelled as “a monster”? In *Oxford English Dictionary*, some of the definitions of said word match Williams’ and Gilmore’s observations, but there is also one which defines the word “monster” as “[a] person of repulsively unnatural character, or exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman; a monstrous example of evil, a vice, etc.” (“monster”), so it would seem that it is possible for a monster to have a completely normal-looking body. This would then be the case for both Dorian Gray and Melmoth the Wanderer — neither of them looks like a monster and yet both of them could be described as monstrous. The other two antagonists, however, conform with Williams’ and Gilmore’s definitions completely. Dracula is unusually strong, several characters draw attention to his mouth, he has fangs and survives on human blood, he can turn into animals or even fog, and Carmilla shares several of these characteristics. In other words, despite two of the monsters being figurative instead of literal, all of them favour a particular type of victim and treat other victims differently.

Throughout the stories, these monsters can be seen inflicting pain and leaving destruction in their wake. Perhaps one of the most shocking examples of this would be Dracula offering a baby’s life in exchange for Harker’s when he interrupts his brides just as they are about to feed on Jonathan. However, this is not the only time the reader witnesses a child get brutally bitten and hurt by vampires in *Dracula* — a similar scene is repeated after Lucy is raised from the dead and starts feeding on children. Even though Dracula is not directly responsible for any of these appalling deaths, he is still the one who brings the aforementioned child to his brides and turns Lucy in the first place. In a similar way, infanticide can be observed in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, where, again, Melmoth is not the one to kill the babe but he is indirectly responsible for its death since it was his unhallowed relationship with Immalee that caused her incarceration and inability to nourish the child properly. Death follows him, just as it does Dracula, Dorian and Carmilla.

While there are instances such as the three mentioned above, where the antagonist is not directly responsible for the deaths or suffering of others, there are also plenty of occasions on which they are responsible, and this is when their monstrosity is truly revealed. For example, the Count singlehandedly butchers the whole crew while journeying to England on a ship, Melmoth kills Immalee's brother, Carmilla is responsible for the death of Bertha, Laura's would-be friend, and Dorian violently murders Basil Hallward, whom he had once considered a friend. These are all examples of victims whose deaths come about quickly and without much preamble; murders and acts of violence that the monsters commit seemingly without giving them much thought.

And yet for every single one of these characters, there comes at least one moment in the narrative when we see them as human, as beings who could possibly be redeemed. This usually happens when a victim enters their lives who makes them re-evaluate their existence or presents an opportunity for them to get something they secretly long for. However, before taking a look at what hidden yearnings hide at the bottom of the monster's heart, it is first necessary to find out what it is about these special victims that unexpectedly brings out the good in the villains.

It would be impossible to talk about these women — for they are all female — without first pointing out that all of them are described as innocent, pure and uncorrupted, even naïve. Immalee in particular is continuously described as very innocent and in no way equipped to confront the evil that Melmoth brings into her life, which is to be expected since she has never known human malice before. Her purity and inexperience are emphasised by the many descriptions of her being one with nature, not to mention the fact that she lives on a deserted tropical island that Maturin more or less describes as Eden. Her innocence and inexperience are what first moves Melmoth, though he seems to be kinder to her than his other potential replacements from the start. Compassion is not a feeling Melmoth displays often and even with Immalee it seems to exist only for a fleeting moment. However, as Jim Hansen points out, from the first time they meet, the Wanderer “begins, against his own inclinations, to develop a sincere romantic attachment to Immalee, who comes to represent the novel's version of a female noble savage figure” (358). Hansen aptly describes Melmoth as desiring Immalee's salvation even “as he works for her destruction” (358) — as the narrative progresses, Melmoth appears unable to stop interacting with Immalee and even goes as far as to warn her father of the danger threatening the girl. As Hennelly, Jr. suggests, “the Wanderer's self-imposed, satanic isolation ...

is never relieved, although it is temporarily abated, but then heightened, by what T. S. Eliot calls the 'awful daring of a moment's surrender' with Immalee" (674). It would appear, then, that Melmoth finds a kindred spirit in Immalee, a girl who shares his feeling of loneliness and isolation — even though with her it is not self-imposed — and whose innocence and pure goodness perhaps remind him of his own long-lost humanity.

A similar thing can, on closer inspection, be observed with Dracula. As Royce MacGillivray points out, Dracula also suffers a kind of self-imposed isolation:

The depiction of Dracula as an alienated figure derives from the traditional vampire legends, the Gothic novels, and the idea of the romantic hero, as well as from Stoker's psychological acumen. When we have seen Dracula in this light, we can grasp the double irony of his statement to Harker in the castle that "I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is." This touching sentimentality, which masks the fact that he wants to be among these people to prey on them, also masks his defeat. (MacGillivray 64)

MacGillivray even goes as far as to say that "Dracula's disastrous expedition to England can even be seen as unconsciously suicidal, as his attempt to extinguish his anguish and a lasting death" (64). Would it be possible to say, then, that Dracula is lonely? After all, he is an immortal being living in one of the most secluded parts of Europe with only his three monstrous brides to keep him company. Add that to the fact that his role in the novel is a distinctly fatherly one (MacGillivray 64), albeit a monstrous version of it, and it seems quite possible that Dracula is, in fact, just trying to enlarge his family. MacGillivray even mentions a rule "that vampires begin their careers by preying first on their nearest kin" and speculates that Dracula's three brides might have been his sisters or daughters (65).

But if so, what makes him choose Lucy and Mina as his victims? Even though they are very good friends, the two girls do not seem to have much in common — Lucy is described as

being very innocent and beautiful while Mina is an independent woman with, as Van Helsing puts it, “a man’s brain” and “a woman’s heart” (ch. 18). W. P. Day speculates that “Lucy, who is a virgin when Dracula makes her his victim, is a target because of her repressed, though extremely sensual, nature” (70). He continues by pointing out her sexual fantasies of marrying three men — inverting Dracula’s female harem — and claims that these “betray an erotic restlessness on which Dracula seizes” (70). However, it might not be only Lucy’s suppressed sexuality that draws Dracula’s attention — after all, they seem to share certain views on life and would perhaps, under different circumstances, make a good match. Not only that, but, as Margot Gayle Backus points out, “[a]s the belle of the marriage market, Lucy was valued as a potential producer and nurturer of children. Following her death, Lucy enacts the norms of motherhood in reverse” (138), so it could be Lucy’s appeal as a potential mother that Dracula finds irresistible. After all, the baby scene with his brides proves that he likes reversing the “natural” role of a mother by feeding women a child instead of having them give birth to one.

With Mina, things are different. She is not only a potential mother, but actually acts as one. As Day observes, “[s]he serves as sister-mother-confessor to [the Crew of Light], though wife to only Harker” (70). Therefore, while Lucy could have become a mother, Mina is already performing that role — in a way — by the time Dracula first shows interest in her. But it is not just Mina’s motherly nature that is emphasised in the novel — from Van Helsing’s description of her, it is obvious that she shares Immalee’s and Lucy’s purity and goodness. While Immalee’s purity is emphasised through her bond with nature and Lucy’s through the strikingly white clothes she always wears, Mina’s appears to be of an almost holy origin. “She is one of God’s women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth” (ch. 14). According to Christopher Craft, this is how the Crew of Light see her, and he aptly describes their conscious conception of women as being “idealized — the stuff of dreams” (117). But who is to say that Dracula does not see her as such as well? Since it has already been established that he enjoys reversing the roles of women, perhaps he cannot resist trying to lure Mina to his side and replacing her holiness with voluptuousness, a trait that seems to characterise all his undead female companions.

Like Dracula and Melmoth, Carmilla is also doomed to an eternity of loneliness. As Saler and Ziegler point out, “the vampire Carmilla and her best known predecessors are primarily motivated by a desire for intimacy with a human, and the need to feed on blood is secondary”

(221). An obvious parallel can be drawn between Melmoth and Immalee and Carmilla and Laura since, in both cases, the monster is forced to keep moving at all times and can never truly settle down, while their love interests live in a remote location with no or very little human contact. Both Laura and Immalee are thrilled at the opportunity to talk to someone and immediately grow fond of that person. As Veeder notes in his article “The Arts of Repression,” “[n]othing contributes more to Laura’s sense of isolation — and thus to her penchant for repression — than her separation from a woman” (206). He goes on to explain that Laura is deeply marked by the lack of a mother and finds a maternal figure in Carmilla when the vampire visits her in her infancy (206).

However, similarities cannot be observed only between Laura and Immalee, who both yearn for company, but between Laura and Lucy as well. Both girls are described as beautiful – Veeder mentions Laura’s “great beauty and genteel upbringing” (218) – and unconsciously repress their sexuality, finding the solution in connection with vampirism. As John L. Greenway suggests, “Lucy seems to find a release from her empty life in vampirism. No longer restrained by convention, she can violate the assumed ‘natural’ roles for women: wife and mother” (78). Laura, on the other hand, “feels sexual attraction so strongly that she becomes at times the aggressor” (Veeder 207), for example by making the first move and taking the hand of her guest upon their first meeting or kissing and embracing the lost Carmilla when she is found (207).

Carmilla, like Lucy, also reverses the traditional role of the mother in that she feeds from her supposed child – Laura. O’Malley clearly states that “critics have almost universally acknowledged the frankness of lesbian desire in [Carmilla]” (138) and, according to Killeen, “Carmilla’s interest in Laura is as much maternal as sexual” (365). Veeder suggests that “suffering, particularly female suffering, arouses Carmilla sexually” (200), but he also states that “Carmilla’s passion is no less natural than any other” (215). He even goes on to say that Carmilla “is touchingly human in her passion, and tragically human in her incompleteness” (Veeder 216), since he believes that Carmilla’s goal is to convince Laura to “commit herself wholly to passion. In that act of commitment, Laura would become the mature partner with whom Carmilla could achieve sexual fulfilment and thus sexual completion” (Veeder 216). Therefore, in Laura, Carmilla finds both a potential mother figure, a potential daughter figure and a potential lover — any and all of which would alleviate her feeling of loneliness.

The last of the monsters is perhaps the most monstrous because he is the only one who starts out as a good and innocent person but gradually turns into a wicked and incredibly cruel one. As O'Malley observes, Dorian's sin is narcissism, which is confirmed not only by his statement that he is "in love with the portrait," but also by his act of actually kissing the portrait later on in the novel (182-183). O'Malley goes on to explain the significance of Dorian's narcissism by referencing Freud: "[F]or as Freud asserts of the male homosexual in general, he 'takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love'" (qtd in O'Malley, 183). This is definitely true of Dorian; as O'Malley indicates, "[i]n the fantasies that Dorian constructs about Sibyl, he turns her into ... an image of himself" (183). So while he describes her as being "the loveliest thing I had ever seen in my life" (Wilde ch. 4) and also as being very shy and gentle, almost childlike (Wilde ch. 8), he never has any true feelings for Sibyl — he falls in love with her art, in which he sees a reflection of himself. Keeping that in mind, it only makes sense that he would consider her special, and that her death would — even if just momentarily — rouse his conscience and make him feel regret and perhaps even shame. Sibyl, on the other hand, loves Dorian with all her heart, and it is her love for him that brings about her destruction, just like Immalee's love for Melmoth brings about hers. As Catherine Wynne points out, "Sibyl Vane can no longer conjoin the performative and the private when she falls in love with Dorian and becomes the tragic Gothic victim of Dorian's own doubled self" (85). Sibyl is the last of the innocent, pure and naïve girls who have great expectations of life but are ultimately destroyed for their gullibility and for loving the wrong person.

In conclusion, the Irish Gothic features two types of victims: the ones that are considered irrelevant and that the stories brush over without any real interest, and the ones that are special, so to speak. The latter are described as being beautiful, innocent and pure, but they are also people that the monster can — ironically enough — identify with. There is a brief moment when we see a ray of humanity break through the thick clouds of monstrosity, but the victim's love is ultimately insufficient to break the monster's curse. More often than not, these special victims' fate is even more cruel than the one reserved for the average victims, since their destruction is physical, psychological and emotional at once. The monster, bereft of the briefest hope of redemption, sinks back into the darkness and waits to strike again.

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# *A Decent Human Being*

*An interview with Jack Harte*

*by Karin Petka*

**“If you gave me a couch and a pillow and left me lying down, I would happily stay there forever,” says the former teacher and principal, active writer and man who single-handedly founded the Irish Writers’ Union and the Irish Writers’ Centre.**

*Jack Harte, an Irish writer and the founder of the Irish Writers’ Union and the Irish Writers’ Centre, visited our small country in November to participate in the Slovenian Book Fair. He is a retired teacher and principal who has dedicated the past 20 years of his life solely to writing. He is a short story writer, a novelist and a playwright. A writer whose books have been translated into many languages such as Russian, Bulgarian, Hindi and German, but not yet into Slovene. He is a very down-to-earth person whose life is not only about writing stories, but seemingly also about living them, since he has a story for every occasion and every memory. Chatting with him was a true pleasure.*

**How would you like to describe yourself using three to five words?**

A decent human being.

**If you could use only one word – which one would you pick?**

I think the word “decent” that I used there is a very good word, because very often, decent people are regarded as mediocre. But I think that if we could reorient the world to live in a decent way and take pride in being decent human beings, the world would be a better place. So, “decent.”

**What is your life motto?**

Oh, you should’ve sent all those to me before, so that I could give deep philosophical thought to it. (laughs) Motto... Well, yes, I have it. It’s actually on my web site - a haiku.

*Keep flying*

*Don't be distracted by the streetlamps*

*Above them the stars*

That's my motto.

**What is your favourite book?**

I have a lot of favourite books in different genres. If I were asked which author I would like to be, to write his books, I would say Bernard Malamud, the American Jewish author. He wrote novels like *The Fixer*, *The Assistant* and *The Natural*. A lot of these were made into film as well. He's an absolutely lovely and beautiful writer. He writes from the point of view of the very poor, very deprived Jewish people in New York. Or in the case of *The Fixer*, it is somebody in Kiev who suffers because he's a Jew. I absolutely love his writing. In some of his stories he takes his own community to task – so it's not the awful Christians or the awful rest of the population of the world. There's a story called *The Jewbird* – it's a brilliant analysis of anti-Semitism and he inverts it beautifully, so that the most significant anti-Semite is a Jewish guy who keeps talking about anti-Semitism. It's lovely and subtle, but it's very simple. So, yes, Bernard Malamud – I would love to have written his books.

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*“So, yes, Bernard Malamud – I would love to have written his books.”*

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**What is your favourite place or attraction in Slovenia from what you have seen so far?**

Probably the most unusual thing, which I thought was absolutely lovely, was the three bridges. That was stunning, yes.

**Do you know any Slovenian words?**

I don't think I picked up any words. I'm not good at picking up languages. I speak English and Irish. After that I have a long agenda, a long to-do list with all the languages that I have yet to learn. You know, the languages of all the countries I've ever visited: Bulgarian, Italian, French, German, Slovenian... I get this urge to learn the language, but of course, I never have time. Oh, God...

You know, one of my novels was published first in Bulgarian, before it appeared in English – *Reflections in a Tar-Barrel*. The funny thing is it was hugely successful in Bulgaria, but not that successful in Ireland. But some years later I met this very famous critic in Ireland – it was the first time I met him. I know most writers and critics in Ireland, but I had never met this guy before. And we started chatting and he said: “I love your work.” And I says: “I hear you on the radio and I admire your literature show.” We kind of flatter each other a little, but then he says: “I love your novel *Reflections in a Tar-Barrel*.” I said I was delighted that he had read it, because it kind of disappeared. “You know, it’s a pity,” he says, “did you get any feedback from the people

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*“And then it made sense – because it was published first in Bulgarian, technically the English was a translation.”*

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who run the Book of the Year?” And I says: “No, no ...” And he says: “Are you sure of that?” And I says: “Aye.” He says: “I was on the board and we had to come up with the shortlist of five novels. We had six. Yours was one of them. We debated and we had a really heated discussion and

eventually it was your one that was knocked off.” And then he said to me, which I though was interesting: “It was first published in Bulgarian, wasn’t it?” And I says “Yeah.”

And then it made sense – because it was published first in Bulgarian, technically the English was a translation. (laughs) And they weren’t allowed to take translations. It had to be the books that were first published in English.

### **How come that it was first published in Bulgarian?**

The reason it was published first in Bulgarian... I had a few books published in Bulgaria and I would often be given an invitation to festivals. This friend of mine was an editor at one of the big companies and he kept asking me when was I going to write another book. At the time I had a novel finished and I told him that. And he says: “How long is it?” And I says: “It’s 76,000 words.” He says: “And it’s finished?” “Yeah, I believe so.” “Okay,” he says, “how much do you want for the Bulgarian rights? Because I will have it translated and published in Bulgarian before it’s published in English.” We were in a pub. So I said: “I wouldn’t sell you the rights to this book for any amount of money. It’s priceless. But I love that wine. I’ll sell you the Bulgarian rights for five cases of that wine – Melnik wine. So he took out a serviette and a pen and started writing a

contract. And then he had everybody sign it as witnesses. And I says that I can't read it in Bulgarian. One of the people there was a translator, so she translated it into English and I got the English version. I then always had the excuse to go back to Bulgaria, to go back and drink my royalties.

**At our department, apart from translation, some students are studying to become teachers. Since you used to be one yourself, what would your advice for us be? What was your favourite part of teaching?**

If you said you wanted to be a writer and asked me which job you should do to earn an income, teaching is one I would not recommend. Because there is a kind of logic out there that as a teacher, you have a fair amount of time in the evening and then you have holidays and this is the time you could use for writing. It doesn't work like that. Teaching is the most exhausting and demanding job that anybody could do. I think aircraft control officers are about the only

people who have a more stressful job. You may go home in the evening with a few hours to spare, but you have no energy to spare. Your energy is drained out of you. And besides, you have to prepare for tomorrow, correct the exercises from yesterday... Teaching is not really conducive in terms of writing, and neither is journalism, by the way. If

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*“Teaching is the most exhausting and demanding job that anybody could do.”*

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you want to be a writer, washing dishes in the restaurant is very good – it doesn't exhaust your mind. But if you are interested in being a teacher... I think it's a great way to spend your life. Although for me it was never conducive to writing at the same time, I have never regretted a single day that I spent teaching or as a principal. I enjoyed every minute of it. You get a huge satisfaction from it; it is a great, great profession, I think. One of the best. There are very few that could rate more highly, except maybe medical professions.

So, I would say that spending your life teaching is a worthwhile way to spend it. What I enjoyed most about teaching was the engagement with people – I abhor the trend towards almost mechanised teaching where everything depends on the grades. To me, that's abhorrent. The first element of teaching is personality; it's the engagement of the teacher with the students. If the teacher is very enthusiastic about something, that will communicate to the students. The

same goes for boredom. The relationship between students and teachers should be guarded. It's not about the grades; it's about the teachers. You have to trust your teachers, employ good teachers, pay them well, give them good conditions and trust them to educate the kids. That's the way I would do it – it's what I did as a principal. My job was to back up the enthusiastic teachers, not to tell them what to do or how to do it. I gave them support.

**Why did you stop teaching and decide to become a full-time writer?**

Well, I did my time. I was a teacher and a principal for 31 years, and before that I had done some other jobs for about 7 years, so I qualified as someone who could retire. I was only 55, but because I had started so young, I was able to retire. What I wanted to do was to give time to writing and I've been healthy and comfortable enough to survive since then, which was exactly 20 years ago. So, yes, I've been extremely lucky on that front.

**How did you start writing? Where does your inspiration come from? How do you pick the form of an idea? How do you choose a genre?**

When I was a teenager, I wrote poems and published them in local magazines and newspapers. It was when I was in my twenties and started teaching short stories that I fell totally in love with them. This form can do everything a poem can do, and can even do it better. I fell out of writing poems, haven't written poems since, really, not seriously. I was writing short stories for 25 years.

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*“This form can do everything a poem can do, and can even do it better.”*

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Later I decided to branch out a little and started writing a novel. And then I started writing plays. I have about seven or eight plays written at this stage, but only three of them have been produced. The fourth is

going to be produced next March.

**So, you used to write poetry when you were younger, but now your genres are mostly novels, short stories and dramas. Do you have a favourite amongst them?**

I couldn't really pick, because what I do – my way of working – is that I have an idea. I am also extremely lazy – in spite of the fact that I am extremely active, my default position is absolute inertia – like, if you gave me a couch and a pillow and left me lying down, I would happily stay there forever. I have to kind of force myself to do anything. First, I have to force myself to get

up in the morning and then I have to force myself to stay up, because of this great urge to go back to bed and just sleep. (laughs) I don't get up full of energy and go to my desk. No; I hate writing, I hate my desk, I hate empty pages in front of me demanding to be filled. I hate it. The only reason that I write is because I have to. I'd have something annoying me, nagging at me, this idea, and then eventually, if it doesn't go away – I do hope it'll go away – if it doesn't go away, I have to write it. And the next decision is for which form it is suitable: poem, story, novel, play? That's how I decide on which genre to pick. So, it depends on the idea. I don't have any particular favourites, though I haven't seriously written

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*“If you gave me a couch  
and a pillow and left me  
lying down, I would  
happily stay there forever.”*

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poems in years. I have just finished another novel, but ideas that seem to come to me more often now belong to the form of plays, so I think I'll be writing more of those now.

**In this issue of the newspaper, we are expecting to have a lot of short stories, so this question simply has to be asked. There has been many a debate on what the definition of a short story should be. What is your opinion? What makes a short story a short story?**

It's a short story. (laughs) It's an interesting question and something that has been debated for generations. The Irish writer Frank O'Connor wrote about how to write a short story. I love his stories, they are brilliant stories – if I had to pick one of the greatest short stories ever written I would pick one of his, because they are that good. But when he wrote about the theory of the short story... It's absolute rubbish. His type of short story is very defined. I don't like his theory. If you compare a short story to a novel, I think it's like comparing a dot, a point, to a straight line. How do you compare the two? A novel goes from here to there, you have certain events, they happen... A dot has no form. It presents 'infinite possibility'. It can be anything, right? Anything under the sun.

My contention of the short story – what it is and what it isn't. One of my contentions is that in trying to understand a short story, one should not compare it to the novel. They are so far apart, you might as well be comparing the short story to a forest... It would be much more constructive and you would understand a short story better if you compared it to a poem. A poem is something that sets out to create a single impression, just has your attention for a few minutes

and plays on your emotions. If it's strong enough, it will affect you and will stay with you. That should be the way the story is. A story sets out to stimulate the imagination, it doesn't set out to go from here to there and have everything tied up in between, as the novel does. Instead, it takes the reader, lobbs a grenade into the reader's imagination, lets it explode in all directions – one reader could go in that direction, one reader could go in the opposite direction... It doesn't really matter. What matters is that you stimulate the reader's imagination and the reader responds. In the case of the short story, the reader is an active participant, they are involved creatively in the short story. They will fill in the gaps. That doesn't happen in a novel – where a

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*“A story sets out to stimulate the imagination, it doesn't set out to go from here to there and have everything tied up in between, as the novel does.”*

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reader is regarded as a passive receiver of the content; everything is explained. This is why short stories are not so popular, because they require you to sit down and think and imagine. To me the short story holds infinite possibilities in terms of form, objectives, impression... and above all it has to engage

the reader and make them involved in creating the end product, which will then be different from reader to reader.

One day, when I was a principal, a woman came to see me about a character in my short story that was in the schoolbooks. She wanted to know what I was trying to say with the story, what it all meant, because her son had to answer some questions for school and she didn't know how to help him. She had lain awake at night puzzling it out. I told her it was open to interpretation and that every reader could bring a different understanding to it. I said that her son should write what he thought of it and if the teacher was not happy with the answer, he should tell her that I said his was the correct answer. (laughs)

**Do you always write in English or do you do it in Irish as well?**

I write in English. I have written in Irish – I think the first short story I published was in Irish. Recently an editor asked me: “Do you ever write in Irish?” And I says: “Nah... I don't think my Irish is strong enough for writing.” He suggested I write a book of short stories in Irish.

**Will you do it?**

Nah... (laughs) No, I find it hard enough to write in English.

### **What is the actual status of Irish Gaelic?**

It's interesting, because the Irish language survived in the west of Ireland but has been gradually dying out. And people were kind of having this countdown to how much longer it would last. It seems to be doomed in the rural areas, but there's a huge upsurge of interest in Irish throughout the English-speaking part of the country, especially in towns and cities. It was mainly spurred by Irish-speaking schools. Those schools are all over the country now and young people seem to speak Irish quite naturally and this is a great development. So, what it's losing in the rural parts, it's gaining in the cities.

### **You founded the Irish Writers' Union and the Irish Writers' Centre. Where did the idea come from? Why? How?**

Up to the 1980's there was no organisation to speak for writers, to represent writers. Absolutely none. I think Ireland at that time was the only country in Europe that didn't have an organisation – which is terrible, because Ireland is famous for its writers more than anything else. There was also no structure for supporting, cultivating and nurturing literature. It was pretty awful. It was also quite paternalistic. Most writers came from a privileged background and most were male, so the new writers coming in were also mostly male. It struck me that what was needed was a trade union to represent writers and get them on professional footing. I floated an invitation to every writer that I could find to join the trade union and almost all of them did. There was a kind of bubbling dissatisfaction there, so they all joined. It was only then that we tackled things such as rights – the first thing we established was the procedure of agreed publishing contracts. We also tackled other outstanding issues such as censorship.

I wanted to do two things: one was to set up a union and another was to set up a place where writers could organise their events, a place that could be their home away from home. A place for people to come in and get advice on writing and help. So the opportunity arose, because there was a huge recession in the 1980's in Ireland – the economy was broke and the civil service was shrinking. The civil service had been using a lot of old buildings in the middle of Dublin, Georgian buildings, but they were leaving them. There was an election and the new prime

minister was interested in the arts – he was also the minister of the arts – so he appointed a writer who had just joined the Union to be his advisor on the arts. And, I thought, interesting... (laughs) I saw a chance and made contact.

At first, they thought I was after money, but when I promised I wasn't, I got an appointment. I presented my idea: the houses cannot be sold and they are not needed because the civil service is shrinking. I asked for one of those old buildings for a national Writers' Centre and my idea was received with enthusiasm. Within a week I was told to go around and choose the building. Later I applied for funding from the new National Lottery, and it was approved. So we set up the Writers' Centre.

**You have already brought politics and the situation in Ireland into the conversation. And this question was bound to come up with the whole of Europe waiting to see what will happen. So, what's your opinion about Brexit?**

(laughs bitterly) It's an un-mitigated disaster, a tragedy. It's just awful. We've been keeping a rather low profile. I could criticise our politicians for lots of things, but not in connection to Brexit. It's an internal British, an internal UK, affair. We have been quietly asserting that there can be no border in Ireland.

These people who proposed Brexit, they are idiots. Like, they proposed Brexit without caring about the border or anything. I wonder if they even know where Ireland is. They are just a stratum of British society and unfortunately, they are hugely influential. Brexit has nothing to recommend it. And I may be left-wing, I may be a socialist, but I cannot understand how the British Labour Party are going along with it. Jeremy Corbyn is admirable in a lot of things that he does and says, but I just can't understand his attitude to the EU, because it is one thing looking after the interest of British workers, but there are more people in the world than just British workers and we should be supporting global solidarity. So, Brexit is an un-mitigated disaster and I don't think that the UK are going to benefit from it.

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*“We have been quietly asserting that there can be no border in Ireland.”*

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**Now, to a happier topic. Christmas is right around the corner and with it, trying out new recipes. Could you suggest something? What is your favourite Irish dish?**

I'm not a food person to be honest. I absolutely hate high-class cuisine. I find it boring. You're supposed to go to these very posh restaurants with this very posh, celebrity chef and then you

*“I absolutely hate high-class cuisine.”*

get these little dishes and have to pay too much. Then you get indigestion, because it's so bloody awful. If I'm going out to enjoy myself with friends or family, I love to go to an Italian restaurant and get pasta, even simple spaghetti

Bolognese. I just love that. Spaghetti Bolognese with a bottle of red wine. Hard to beat that.

**How about something traditionally Irish?**

We have a lot of Irish dishes. Many very basic ones, like the Irish stew (mutton, lamb in a stew with potatoes, vegetables, onions). I love that, I think it's wonderful.

**Since it is almost Christmas – what are your thoughts on the topic? How do you usually celebrate it? What does an Irish Christmas look like? What is your way of celebrating Christmas?**

Personally, by ignoring it. (laughs) I hate all the hullabaloo and shopping. And the phoney socialising, like when people say they have to meet up for a drink before Christmas. You didn't have to meet up for the last six months, so why now? I have a rule that after 8<sup>th</sup> December, which is our official start of Christmas, I don't organise anything. I just ignore everything. But Christmas itself I like, because we have a family gathering. It's quite a big family and the subsequent days are so quiet - I love it from Christmas Day right through. That I love, because it has to do with the real family. So in that sense I do look forward to Christmas.

**Thank you very much, it was very lovely chatting with you!**

# *Thus spoke Éamon*

*by Damiir Rackov*

It was late 2019 and throwing milkshakes at politicians had become the single most authentic form of political protest; the infamous Molotov cocktail had even slipped to third place on the list of most revolutionary concoctions, while the Venezuelan poop bomb and the milkshake held second and first place, respectively. It was also rumoured that a clandestine group of the so-called British Remainers was plotting a massive attack on CCHQ, the Conservatives' headquarters, with thousands of litres of milkshake, illegally procured from cancerous fast-food chains. But such stories were just imaginative conspiracy theories drenched in the absurd and the unlikely. Nevertheless, a valid question was to be extracted from that hypothetical act of terrorism; why would people be so angry that they would release a deluge of the sugary dairy product onto the Conservatives, risking a lifetime in jail for the murder of those unlucky lactose-intolerant Tories who would perish in the milk tsunami? The answer rhymes with blatant ignorance and delusional arrogance... sort of.

Yes, Brexit, the mammoth process spearheaded by Theresa May, which was designed to remove the UK from the EU, overshadowed only by her party's gargantuan failures and missteps. May's government had been given an ultimatum by the EU to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement between the Conservatives and the Labour party on a Brexit deal before October 31. This would have taken the process to the next step towards the final exit from the European bloc, but with certain legal guarantees facilitating new trade negotiations.

As predicted, May gave a vague and meaningless speech on the last day of October, confirming everyone's fears that an agreement hadn't been reached. Labour was of no use in the cross-party negotiations. After Jeremy Corbyn left the party due to increasingly extreme accusations of anti-Semitism and started his new career as a Soundcloud rapper nicknamed Yung Jezza with regular concerts in the Gaza strip, the opposition was not able to put forward any constructive ideas of how to reach a compromise. Unwilling to extend Brexit any further, the European negotiators announced the end of talks and, by doing so, turned Hard Brexit into reality.

The following weeks were hectic for every level of British society, as well as for the Irish, who were also deeply affected by the UK's sudden exit. The “no deal” outcome brought back demons from a bloody past tainted by decades of armed conflict. Having left the EU Customs Union without any plans of how to keep the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland open, a physical barrier with military presence was reinstated. This made both parts of the island furious and triggered an almost instantaneous avalanche of protests. Naturally, the New IRA seized the opportunity and used the furore as fertile ground for their violent ideology of guerrilla warfare. The spectre of the Troubles loomed over Ireland, awaiting a new Civil War.

The state of chaos forced political parties to grasp at anything in order to mitigate the situation, however, none of them had an actual plan, except for Sinn Féin. It turned out that the Republican Party did not pursue only revolutionary goals but delved into the occult as well. A side project that had been put on hold for years was brought back to life in those dire times, as a last resort. The party's Occult Department, consisting of a group of retired modern-day druids and witches and a professor of Philosophy, who had been trying to translate Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into Celtic Irish for five years, was revamped and given the task and a sufficient budget to find an adequate solution for the border crisis.

The group's collective knowledge of ancient spells, curses, magic concoctions and obscure metaphysical theory was, indeed, quite formidable, yet every plan they devised seemed to be too destructive and rooted in a military-invasion type of tactic. The Department was instructed by the highest circles of the party not to fight the rising violence with even more violence, since that had been done before and had proven to be inefficient. Such restrictions automatically removed certain ideas from the picture, such as storming Westminster Palace with coked-up leprechauns and abhartachs (the Philosophy professor would have supplied the stimulant).

The professor, under the influence of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* concept, argued for the introduction of a new leader, an “overman” to guide the Irish and British society into a new period of prosperity and tolerance. He understood the famous phrase “God is dead”, uttered by Zarathustra, as a reference to the current political and social climate: Brexit was the equivalent of “God” – the source of the moral system and values that people looked up to and believed in – and this idea died with a no-deal exit from the EU, just as “God” died when the Enlightenment asserted its dominance over Western society and scientific rationality and materialistic

philosophy became the leading paradigm, causing the population to spiral into a state of nihilism, rejecting every value, ushering in an era of confusion and mayhem.

But who would be capable of causing such an immense shift and powerful enough to face the people responsible for Brexit? A name came to everyone's mind, especially when considering a suitable candidate for the clearance of the border between the North and the Republic – Éamon de Valera. Only one detail impeded the plan: the former president of Sinn Féin and an ardent opponent of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which divided the island into two entities, died in 1975.

Fortunately, the occultists knew of a magical ritual that could bring de Valera back from the dead. In order to resurrect the chosen one, they needed to find a yew tree, the Celtic symbol of rebirth and longevity, make a fire from its branches, recite an ancient spell and throw a personal item that once belonged to the deceased into the fire.

First, a heist was organised: the Department travelled to Bruree, where they broke in the De Valera Museum and stole a pair of his glasses. Next, they infiltrated a local churchyard with an imposing yew tree, which had probably been used for pagan ceremonies by the Celts before vain Christians desecrated it. They made a pile of branches and set them aflame, one of the druids started chanting an incomprehensible spell and finally, the glasses were thrown into the fire.

The wind started blowing, producing a howling sound, similar to that of a Banshee, which can nowadays be heard crying around certain families' homes, foretelling an imminent slowing of the wi-fi (an event even more tragic than the death of a family member). The yew tree started to shake violently and the ground cracked open, exposing a network of roots. Suddenly, the entangled formation of roots began to move and, while loosening, a body was revealed underneath. The semi-decomposed corpse crept out of the gaping hole, collected the sacrificed glasses, put them on and stood upright. Fortunately, magic did not obey the rules of logic and the Department was able to invoke de Valera in a random cemetery outside his actual resting place in Dublin.

A summit was held at Sinn Féin headquarters, during which they briefed zombie de Valera on the political and social havoc caused by the Tories, UKIP and the DUP, and how they wanted him to engage in a campaign designed to undo the wrongs of the Brexit movement.

To everyone's horror, de Valera refused to act as a political figure, saying that he was done with negotiations, diplomacy and formal rigidity. While dead, he had learned a thing or two about life and how to solve even the most insurmountable problem. Oddly, the only sounds which could be heard in the dead dimension were guitars drenched in noise, bone-pulverising basslines, breakneck drums, and demonic gurgles and screams - Death Metal.

This peculiar music genre with its lyrical topics subtly alluding to torture, blasphemy, extinction of the human race, every imaginable sort of obscenity, et cetera, provided de Valera with a new perspective on how one should manage existence in one realm or the other.

Enlightened de Valera left Sinn Féin and disappeared into the night, leaving the entire party disheartened and hopeless. Some even feared that the almost five decades spent in what some called hell had turned their beloved leader into a psychopathic demon with bad taste in music and murderous inclinations. Everyone was preparing for the worst-case scenario: they envisioned every possible news outlet reporting on a mass killing of politicians in London the following day with gutted, skinned and decapitated bodies decorating Westminster Palace. But such news never came and all the politicians still carried on with their respective nonsense: Boris Johnson was still trying to calculate the price of milk, mumbling; Jacob Rees Mogg was still insisting he was a man of the people in Latin and Nigel Farage was still being covered in milkshakes. Sinn Féin was relieved, but it still had to locate and find a zombie.

Months passed and although the UK and Ireland were still engulfed in weekly protests, strikes and domestic attacks by a number of paramilitary groups, the population seemed to have gradually acclimatised to the new frenzied environment. Everyone was just waiting for the summer months and the festival season to begin in order to momentarily forget the state of their countries.

Of course, the biggest event of the season would be Glastonbury, attracting more than 200,000 people, and in 2020 it looked like the socio-political unrest would motivate the artists to give some of the most intense performances of their careers.

The Occult Department was abolished after de Valera left Sinn Féin and the party had given up on searching for him. Documents and evidence about the mission were destroyed and the party adopted the tactic of ignoring the problem until it was forgotten.

But de Valera did not intend to remain in the shadows anymore: while in self-imposed isolation, he devised a plan with which he would reveal his philosophy to the people of the

British Isles. During his death, he had become quite fond of Death Metal, not because he agreed with the lyrics or fantasised about those topics, but rather because the extreme music genre showed him how tortured human souls were and that they needed a medium to express their ire and frustration. Through such music, he intended to channel the collective disappointment and fury and hoped to achieve a unified movement that would stop the degradation of society.

He got in touch with the Occultists, who became his backing band members, and through some connections they managed to get a slot on the Glastonbury line-up. Naturally, de Valera did his research and slightly adapted his music to fit the trend of 2020. The result was a three-hour conceptual Trap/Death Metal performance.

Fans stood motionless, some in awe, some aghast, but they were all listening to the music of Éamon and the Occultists, which was the official band name. An avantgarde mix of heavy bass beats, massive guitar riffs, embellished with sinister synths, accompanied by de Valera's growling and screaming. Yung Jezza made multiple appearances on the stage as well, delivering sharp verses with which he called upon the audience to embrace solidarity and to mobilise against the political currents that tried to tear their countries apart.

Social media was on fire and so were the stage speakers. Moshing and wild crowd-surfing broke out. The pandemonium started to spread across the entirety of the festival area. The listeners, upon hearing the music, fell into a trance and started to spazz and headbang. The music spread across Wales, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland via social media, radio and television broadcasts. The violent movement did not seem random, though; a certain pattern started to appear, showing an obvious common direction of every person - London or, more precisely, Westminster Palace.

The biggest mosh pit in the world started to converge at the political centre of the UK - the place where it had all begun. At the time of the concert, a cross-party meeting between the Conservatives, UKIP and the DUP was underway. They were soon besieged by the frenetic crowd. Security forces did not intervene because they were part of the crowd which was moving into the palace, destroying everything in its path as a swarm of locusts, leaving nothing but desolation behind. The mass of agitated legs, arms, fists and torsos imprisoned the political elite in their own safe haven.

Then, Éamon and the Occultists slowed down, leaving only the guitarist chugging empty notes, as if he were a clock counting down the last seconds until the forthcoming end. Yung

Jeza and de Valera instructed the entranced horde to split, leaving the politicians in the middle. They were preparing for a Wall of Death.

The drums and other instruments picked up speed and the two frontmen started a countdown: “3, 2, 1, go!”



*Eamon* by Eva Melave

The bass-drop produced by the speakers caused a small tectonic shift in the western and southern parts of England, which triggered a mini-tsunami that flooded parts of Ireland and France. The ground caved in and the stage plummeted into the crater, taking the band with it. The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic collapsed because of the low frequencies. The Wall of Death obliterated Westminster Palace, sending a shockwave across the whole of London, shattering windows. The two sides of the berserk crowd slammed into each other with such force that it caused the atoms caught in the centre to implode. The group of politicians dematerialised.

The event was later named The Great Crowdkill, and the crater, located where Glastonbury had once been held, was preserved to commemorate everyone who participated in the movement. After The Great Crowdkill, people came back into possession of their senses and with an abundance of footage they reconstructed the events of that day. No one was held accountable and a new government was formed. Britain was given the chance to rebuild itself and to renegotiate certain aspects of the Brexit deal. With this, the government aimed to appease both sides of the population. Éamon de Valera and the band were never seen again.



# *Monuments*

*by Primož Čibej*

When you are a child, you never notice these things.

It was the same with us. All we cared for was play and whatever it was we were chasing through the forest and across the clearing. Our worn shoes sometimes stepped onto the stones just so that we could pounce after the item of interest at the time. Other times we simply jumped across the stones or we ran straight down the middle. We were careless and without a thought to spare for the lying stones.

Yet no matter how insignificant they were, the stones were always there. Overgrown by the green grass or moss during wintertime, they lay dormant. They did not disturb our play. Perhaps we didn't bother them either. Perhaps our footsteps reminded them of long-gone dances and the footsteps which our kin have long ago forgotten.

It might also be that our cries and shrieks reminded them of songs which we have lost to time. One after the other, the voices and the footsteps left and the stones remained alone until the day they felt the approaching footsteps and the joyous shrill voices of children once again.

Can you imagine what the stones must have felt when we first ran past them? Nothing, I know. Of course. They are, after all, just stones. What could something so cold and abandoned have felt when we rushed past like swallows? We never noticed them and they paid us no mind. A status quo upheld for centuries ever since the first of the stones must have fallen.

When we got older, just old enough to start noticing things, we began to notice one another. We began to notice how she and he looked so inviting when spring came and we noticed how the bottle of whiskey was not a sin so long as Mom and Dad didn't see us. And, purely by accident, sitting next to a roaring hearth, I took notice of just how beautifully your eyes start to glimmer when the embers are flung from the dancing flames. And as we did our best to talk, we took notice of how conversation took form within and between ourselves – in the shape of a circle.

And so it was that with a bottle of Grandfather's reserve in hand, while seeking refuge from our elders so that we could converse in peace like civilised people, we took notice of just how neatly the stones were arranged on the grassy clearing. Perfect for conversation – and

perfect to light a fire in the middle. Two compulsory components of any evening which held promise of the unspoken and the unallowed.

The organisation went smoothly. The clearing was in the middle of a dense forest, far away from the jurisdiction of those who had gifted us with life and those who came before them. It also meant that no distant travel was needed to gather the logs for the pyre which grew after less than a day's work. We gathered twigs and lumber, arranging them into a soaring bonfire which was taller than some of the girls. Our own tower of Babel to spite the parents – to prove that we were above their ingenuity in preventing us from drinking like fully grown men and women.

With that rebellious principle burning in our chests, the bonfire was built. Someone brought blankets to lay over the stones so that we wouldn't have to sit upon their old, cold surface. Another brought their battered guitar. Battered yet functional, and that was all that mattered. Everyone chipped in when it came to assembling enough drinks to last the night. Someone was even gifted with such foresight that they brought with them two woven baskets full of bread and cheese which could be spared (or nicked from the pantry without anyone noticing too soon). And someone turned up with enough candles to light the way through the forest, in case someone got lost when they went to take a leak, or they were running late for the party nobody would ever want to miss out on.

On that day, winter turned to spring. And it ushered each and every single one of us towards the gathering.

We arrived in groups of three or four. We followed the trail of lit candles and lanterns, some of them extinguished by the occasional gust of wind. We lit them up with matches again and continued, everyone gathering around the bonfire.

As our group came out of the forest and into the clearing, I turned around to check if anyone was coming right after us. What I saw was a forest of lanterns, dancing like blazing fairies in the distant, long trail between the trees. And these fairies had guided us here, all of us. As if the fairies themselves were convening after so long to once again bear witness to a gathering amidst the stones. Do you think the stones were smiling? Or perhaps the fairies were?

What was certain was that we were all smiling. You can blame it on the number of gathered bottles, some of them already opened and being passed around. You can even blame it on the fact that someone knew how to play all the songs we knew how to sing. We didn't,

really. Some of us knew half of the lyrics. Others knew just the refrains. And then some just occasionally shouted words they remembered from long ago. None of us were certified singers, and yet we began our celebration as an impromptu chorus, displaced from the cold pavement of a church quire and placed between the stones in the woodland clearing.

Perhaps it was then for the first time in centuries that sacred songs broke free of the marble constraints and fled back to where they had emerged from. Detached from the world, we sang the songs which came to be here. We forgot about what kind of music each of us listened to. We didn't really want to sing that anyway. Few of us knew how to rap and it's awfully difficult to play electronic dance music on a worn-out acoustic guitar.

So the guitar player plucked the strings and played the songs we'd listen to when the elders gathered around to sing. Be it during holidays or dark winter evenings, when those we would call old met and had a few drinks too many, they would always start to sing. We never paid those songs any attention. Much like we never paid any attention to the stones. Yet the songs were always there. As were the stones.

And these always present songs came pouring out of our mouths, gathered somewhere in the far reaches of our lungs and hearts, each line written across a different vein full of blood. The same blood that we shared with our elders who sang. And now we shared their songs. Or rather, we took those songs and made them our own. Perhaps this is what tradition is all about. Taking from others what has always been yours since the day you were born.

Before we knew it, we were all singing. And before we knew it, we were all drunk, just like the elders whenever they sang.

I remember vividly the few seconds it took me to register that someone had accidentally bumped into me. I was shocked at how unresponsive my body had become. I sat down and slammed one fist against the other. Nothing. Not a nerve stirred to life. I lifted my hand and slammed it down against the cold stone upon which I was sitting. And suddenly, I felt something surge through my bones, digging itself into my marrow and my blood. I was drunk, so it must've surely been just my physiology telling me to stop hurting myself. Advice which I refused to heed far too often during the coming years of my life. So I stood up, nearly jumping to my feet when I noticed how easy it was to move. I noticed how warm I felt.

I noticed her eyes somewhere left of the bonfire. She was standing next to the lit pyre and it seemed as if her hair was dancing with the flames. Crimson locks of untamed youth, eager to

join the roaring fire. Looking back at it now, that's what I noticed. But at the time, all I thought I noticed was the basket with a few bottles of alcohol in it.

With a goal set, I made my way carefully around the sitting people, the standing people and the lying stones. The basket was right there and I thought that if I didn't get at least a few more glasses of something potent in me that night, I might die, or worse – sober up.

I managed to stumble up to her. She stood in front of the basket and she noticed me approaching past the warming bonfire. I blinked at least five times before I noticed her smiling. So I smiled back, in hopes of getting to the drinks as quickly as possible.

In a few awkward motions, I pointed down toward the basket, grinning at her in an apologetic fashion. She tilted her head to the side and her neck seemed to catch fire as the flames were reflected upon her skin. She was sweating. I must have been sweating too and not just from the flames' proximity. She reached down, grabbed one of the bottles and lifted it up to our faces. And there, she wiggled it invitingly. It was then that I understood exactly how dogs feel when you shake a stick at them before you throw it.

But there was something else I took notice of. It was how her facial features changed shape within the whiskey. The nearby fire cast an eerie shadows' play within the bottle and the more I looked, the more I saw her eyes grow sharper. The flames and the whiskey offered sight beyond what my drunken eyes could see.

And through the soft brown lens of the whiskey, I saw her change shape. All I could see was within the whiskey. Her gentle smile twisting into a grin full of fangs. Her wild hair rising like hackles. Her fingers bloom into claws and her eyes turn from blue to amber. For a split moment, I thought I saw a reflection of the moon in the whiskey, just above her. But the moon was painted red and her eyes shone like gold.

But then she lowered the bottle and my eyes were met with blue ones. And red hair. And soft, pale skin which came closer and closer as she began uncorking the bottle.

“So, who are you?” she asked.

Truthfully, I replied, “I don't know anymore.”

The rest of that night is history. It feels as if I woke up the next morning yesterday. It feels as if part of that night, of that place, attached itself to me. It completed some part within me which I didn't even know existed. For a brief spell, it made me feel whole. It should come as no surprise then that I returned to the circle decades later, when I felt most broken.

I returned to the stones partly because I wanted to be alone and partly because I hoped that I could find some part of me to repair myself once again. I paced across the clearing, hoping that there was something there that could help me. But the bonfire had burnt away. The baskets had been carried home. The alcohol had been drunk. The cheese and bread eaten. Nothing remained. Nothing at all, until I bumped my foot against it. Only the stones remained.

They were there still, as they have always been. Lying low and forgotten, just as I felt at the time. When I asked you if you could tell what the stones felt, I said they naturally felt nothing. But in that moment, I empathised with them. My fingers hooked around the worn, coarse edges of a stone. I pulled and shoved and after nearly breaking my back, I sat with my back against the standing stone. Just one, but it was a start. If nobody was there to pull me up, then at least I would be there to pull the stones back up.

To someone who's never done it, hauling stones might sound like the most trivial task. So miniscule and primitive. Those people might also be unaware of just how much stone happens to weigh and just how unwilling it can be to cooperate. But I didn't care at the time. Like it or not, I was going to push them up again. Maybe if I hadn't resisted help so much back then, someone would've been able to pull me up as well.

I pushed and pulled. Each stone was my own personal condensed journey to Golgotha with its weight burdening my shoulders. I must've ruined every piece of clothing I had on me that day, knees scraping against the ground, shoulders grinding across the jagged rocky surface.

But I didn't care. It was my blood that had raised these stones ages ago and it would be the same blood which would help them be raised high and proud again.

When I finally managed to lift the last one of them, I must've looked flagellated in body – but not spirit. My spirit swelled within me with each heartbeat as I knelt amidst the standing stones. All of them proud and mighty, like they had been when the blood of which mine is but an echo danced and sang between them. And echo to echo, I felt my all resonate within the standing stone chamber. They stood once again.

I stood up in the centre of the standing stones, catching my breath when I caught a glimpse of it all with the corner of my eye again. The distant fairy lights hiding in the forest shadows. The gentle whispers of a song upon the wind. And most of all, I once again caught sight of those feral eyes. Those two amber moons of youthful abandon, drawn forth from a memory which I'd long ago forgotten.

And just before the memory faded and the forest was but a forest once again, I saw her fangs smile at me again. And I smiled back before I finally knew the answer to the question which she had posed all those years ago.

I am these stones and I am the blood which I inherited.

I am right here.



# *Poblacht na hÉireann*

*by Stania Rakočević*

On a rainy day in Dublin, Patrick Pearse was sitting at a wooden table in a small dark apartment on the fifth floor. A blank piece of paper and a pen were lying in front of him. Apart from the dim light coming from a small desk lamp, the apartment was shrouded in darkness. The dark room reflected his dark thoughts.

“Will this even work?” Patrick asked himself, staring through the window. “Will this be enough to persuade the people of Ireland?”

“Enough,” he told himself after looking at the blank paper for more than an hour. “I must do this.”

He picked up his pen and started writing. The words poured out of him with greater ease than he had expected.

One hour later, he finally put down the pen and took the paper into his hand. As he looked at the first three words written in the Irish tongue, his heart brimmed with pride.

*Poblacht na hÉireann.*

“The Republic of Ireland,” he whispered to himself.

He had been dreaming about it for a very long time, hoping his dream would come true someday. As he looked at the written words, he realized his hope might finally be fulfilled in the weeks to come. The mere thought of a free Irish Republic sent shivers down his spine. Yet his mind was still full of fear and doubts. He was uncertain about some parts he had written. There was one part in particular that bothered him immensely.

He read it again: “...she now seizes that moment, and supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.”

Four words caught his eye. *Gallant allies in Europe.*

“Should we, in the name of Ireland, thank the Germans in times such as these, when our fellow Irishmen are fighting them?” wondered Patrick. Undecided, he continued reading. “We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible...”

After half an hour of correcting certain aspects, he finally put his pen down.

“It is finished!” he yelled out into the empty room, his face beaming with excitement. “The Proclamation of the Irish Republic is complete.”

He quickly put on his cloak, placed the folded proclamation in his pocket and hurried out of the apartment. Outside, the sun shone feebly through the murk onto the empty streets. He ran across the road and knocked on the door of a small house. After a few seconds, the door opened and there stood Thomas Clarke.

“The Proclamation is finished, Tom.”

“Already?” Tom gasped. “Come in, quickly. I am dying to read it.”

They stepped into the living room and sat down on the sofa. Barely restraining his emotions, Patrick handed Tom the proclamation. He took it eagerly and started reading it. After a few minutes he put the paper down.

“I think it’s perfect,” he told Patrick.

“Do you think I have included everything necessary in it?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“What about the part where I mention the gallant allies in Europe? Don’t you think that part is controversial? Perhaps even inappropriate? After all, many Irishmen have been killed by the Germans in the war. Maybe I should just leave that part out.”

“I think you ought to leave it as it is,” said Tom. “We have talked about this already. They tried to help us with the provision of weapons. We have to thank them for that. Besides, this is not the part of the proclamation we should focus on. The most important parts are the ones where you talk about the rights and the freedom that Ireland is entitled to,” said Tom as he began reading the middle of the fourth paragraph. “The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally...”

“I still doubt that people will be on our side,” Patrick interrupted him.

“Maybe not at first,” replied Tom, “but I think they will be in the end. Our actions might not have an impact during our lifetime, but they will surely influence future generations. We must do it for them, Patrick. For future generations. For future generations of Ireland.”

They looked at each other for some time, both immersed in their own thoughts. After several minutes of profound silence, Tom stood up.

“Don’t doubt yourself too much, Patrick. The ideas you presented are truly inspirational. And they will inspire the Irish. Your talk of the liberties, equal rights and equal opportunities that have been unjustly denied to the Irish people for centuries will encourage people and spur them to act. For centuries, the people of Ireland have been oppressed by the monarchy. Enough of that. We need a new and fresh start.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” said Patrick, “but will this proclamation be persuasive enough?”

“It will have to be. It will be. I am certain of it.”

“I hope you are right,” said Patrick. “I must go now. Come to my apartment tomorrow with the others so we can print the proclamation together. We must make as many copies as we can. And then we must get ready for Monday. The big day.”

They shook hands and looked at each other, both equally nervous.

“The future of Ireland is in our hands.”

Patrick woke up very early the next day. He dressed as quickly as he could. He had no time for breakfast.

*Tom and the others should be here any minute*, he thought, walking up and down the room. After a few more moments there was a knock on the door.

“Come in!” yelled Patrick.

Clarke was the first to enter, followed by James Connolly, Thomas MacDonagh, Seán MacDiarmada, Joseph Plunkett and Éamonn Ceannt.

“Before we sign the Proclamation, we should go over the plan for tomorrow once more,” suggested Tom.

The others agreed. They talked about their strategy for more than an hour, debating over certain aspects of it every now and then.

“We will seize ten buildings with the help of other members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The most important building is the General Post Office. We must seize that one. Meanwhile, Patrick will read the Proclamation in front of the Post Office. He will read it as loud as he can, so the passers-by will immediately know what is going on. After that, the news of the event will surely spread like wildfire. Once that happens, a fight might erupt. We will not use

our firearms unless absolutely necessary. People might get wounded, some may even get killed, but that must not distract us from our goal, which is to seize Dublin. Seizing Dublin will be the first step towards liberation. The first step towards freedom.”

The excitement in the room was palpable. Despite the fear that dwelled among the men, every one of them was ready. Or at least as ready as they would ever be.

“Before Tom and I go to the printing shop to make copies of the Proclamation, we must all sign it,” said Patrick.

Tom was the first to do it, followed by the others.

“We should go home and rest now,” suggested Tom. “Tomorrow will be a hard day. Probably the hardest day of our lives. We will meet in the alley next to the Post Office, as agreed. Be there on time.”

That said, they left the room.

It was still dark outside when Patrick woke up the next morning. He tried to stay in bed a little longer but quickly realized that was not possible. He was too nervous to stay still. Wanting to distract himself somehow, he tried eating some breakfast. After a few bites of porridge, he realized he had no appetite at all.

*Maybe I should go over my speech one more time*, he thought. He picked up the Proclamation and started reading it. The more he read it, the more motivated he became. The whole text filled him with enormous confidence. All his worries and doubts about the Proclamation and their cause disappeared. The gained confidence gave him strength. He became so immersed in the text that he completely lost track of time. When he looked at the clock after a while, he gasped.

“Is that the time?” he exclaimed. He quickly put on his cloak and hurried out of the room. Clutching the Proclamation tightly in his hand, he ran down the streets. After five minutes of running, he had to take a break.

*I am too old for this*, he thought while desperately gasping for air. A part of him wanted to turn around and go back to his warm bed, but another, more determined part of him knew that was not an option. Reluctantly, he started running again.

Tom and the others were already waiting for him when he arrived.

“Where have you been?” yelled Tom.

“You know punctuality is not my strongest suit,” said Patrick laughingly.

“Everyone is in place,” said Tom. “Ten groups will seize the buildings, while others will march down the streets, armed with guns. That is when you must stand in front of the Post Office and read the Proclamation, Patrick. While you are reading it, our men will spread the copies all over town.”

“Agreed. Let’s go.”

Patrick did not know what to expect. He had no idea how this event would turn out. Coming to a halt in front of the Post Office, he looked at the passing crowd that had no idea what was about to happen. He spread out the piece of paper and started reading.

“Irishmen and Irishwomen: in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.”

At first, people paid him no mind. Some looked at him suspiciously as they walked past the building, while others did not even spare him a glance. This made Patrick a little hesitant, but he continued reading nevertheless. After less than a minute, a small crowd finally started to gather around him.

*What will they think of me?* wondered Patrick. *No, I mustn’t get distracted. I must keep reading.*

By the time he finished, there was chaos on the street. People were shouting and jostling and it did not take long for some to start fighting. The brawls were quickly followed by the first fired shots. Patrick ran to one corner of the street and watched.

“This is it,” he thought, his heart beating very fast. “The Rising has begun!”



# *Twenty-One Good Ones*

*by Vanja Gajić*

It is Thursday again, which means that I have to get to school by 7 am for finals prep. One would think that in light of Easter festivities, we would be spared the torture, Jesus having undergone it for us and all that, but alas, here I am, once again trying to find my tie at the break of dawn. At least I can sleep in tomorrow though, and we don't fast on Good Friday in our house. Vera from next door still has to wait till Sunday to get her chocolate eggs because her granny is bent on going to heaven and says she is not about to let some greedy kindred eat her ticket to Jerusalem away. Thank God for Nan Sinead. I think she'd sooner go on the cross herself than deny us treats. I suppose she's more of a cultural Catholic – until the word "Protestant" enters the conversation, that is. It doesn't take much to provoke her either, just the mention of the British, England, the Queen ("Queen Elizabeth, you mean? You know there are lots of queens around, I don't see how she has any more to do with us than the rest of them."), Meghan Markle ("Americans are supposed to be on our side!"), tea ("Won't be long until the Protestants claim ownership over that, too."), or even swimming ("We fought for this island, we might as well stay on it!"). I think she might actually disown me if I ever said I was from Londonderry instead of Derry. She is a child of the crossfire, after all, and she's not about to let us ceasefire babies forget that. I'm not saying she nags about it all the time, but it'd be nice not to get a "If you lived thirty years ago, you'd never bicker like this because you'd be too busy hoping she lives to see another day, and you live to see her again" every time I complain about one of my friends even in the slightest of ways. I do really love my nan, but sometimes the old woman's fussing and rambling about the Troubles gets the best of me. She thinks I cannot possibly imagine the ordeal, and she's probably right, but I don't know why she would want me to. Didn't they fight so we wouldn't have to?

I manage to get to school a few minutes early and overhear Tommy say his republican cousin told him the IRA wouldn't miss an opportunity to mark the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Irish failure. The 20<sup>th</sup> would have been too obvious, apparently. Tommy's alright, a nice lad, though he's quite full of it at times, and the way he talks about this IRA stuff like it was some sort of public sacrifice makes me want to shake him by the shoulders until all the nonsense comes out

through his ears. I suppose I should cut him some slack; he turned out all right considering half of his family are Provisionals. Whenever we go for a walk through town and see Mr O'Connell, Tommy's grandad, Nan turns in the opposite direction and heads the other way, no matter where we were set to go. She never speaks about it, but my dad says Mr O'Connell was one of the men who were there when Nan's brother was shot. Before that they were pals, and O'Connell would even come around to my nan's house on occasion.

Some people are absent from school today. Most of them live in the city centre, and their parents are probably panicking about the expected riots. Even Sara, whose folks usually lean on the rational side of thinking, is absent. It's a real bummer, though; she's my desk mate and I could really use someone to chat with during all the boring Easter Rising stuff. Honestly, I don't know how many times they think we need to hear about the bombs and the rebels and the evil Englishmen. Every year we have the Easter Week reserved for lectures about the Irish struggle, and the teachers talk about it with such zeal and urgency that one would think people are still killing each other on the streets. We're just short of having to tick a box agreeing not to throw bombs and signing our name under it. "I promise not to put bombs in bins. I swear to hate the English in a peaceful manner and to celebrate their potential misfortune without causing it directly." I am exaggerating, but it really *is* quite absurd. As if making a poster about the victims of the Rising would discourage anyone who's mental enough to kill people over some lines on a map.

But despite all the arguments against pestering the youth with the same stale old stories, we are once again stuck listening to Mr O'Brien banter about 1916 as if he himself had shared whiskey with the Irish rebels. It's almost comical when he occasionally remembers that bombings and shootings are generally not applauded in this day and age and tries to rectify his statements with a PC disclaimer. The acrobatics his brain performs show on his face perfectly as he tries to subtly transition from talking about how bravely Irishmen fought and how we "showed those Protestants what we're made of" to promoting pacifism and renouncing terrorism.

Miss Murphy, on the other hand, tries to make the commemoration lesson pleasant for us by showing us a film about the fight for independence. As she's obsessed with Liam Neeson, apparently, the film happens to be *Michael Collins* every single year. Liam Neeson is old enough

to be my dad. He might even be too old to be my dad. Suffice it to say the class does not participate in her blissful sighs each time he appears on-screen.

These are the standard procedures, but because of this year's Civil War centenary everyone's going all out – we had extra classes about the Soloheadbeg ambush and the Dáil. Naturally, this provided a perfect opportunity to put us into groups and force us to discuss the events, or rather sit in tiresome silence for twenty minutes. It feels like the sun comes out when it is three o'clock and we are finally free to go home. It doesn't, of course – as the priest told us when we were children, the rain during Easter Week is what washes the blood off Jesus.



*Twenty-One Good Ones* by Ema Štarkl

After school I spend most of the afternoon in my bedroom doing some reading for the essay that's due after the holidays. Later in the evening I go downstairs for a cup of cocoa before bed. When I pass by the living room to get to the kitchen, I see my parents and Nan watching the news, though it's surely past the time when the evening programme usually airs. It's a bit odd that Ma is sitting with Da and Nan, as she usually reads in the evening. She says it's the only bit of peace and quiet she gets. From the kitchen I hear the reporter mention today's riots in

Derry. Something big must have happened if they decided to air the story this late. But the media always jumps on riots. It can be five people walking around wrapped in Irish flags, and the story is reported as if it were the beginning of an uprising.

I put a cup of milk in the microwave and go back to the living room to sit with the family for a minute. All three of them are staring at the screen in shock as a photo of a young woman appears in front of some footage of a burning police car. The news anchor says she was shot in the head, presumably by Irish radicals who had been aiming at British police. The woman was Lyra McKee, a journalist from Belfast. As they say her name, I remember I've heard it before. The news ends with condolences to her family and Da turns off the TV.

We sit in silence for a few moments, and then the microwave beeps. The sound pulls us out of our state of numb bewilderment. Da is the one to break the silence.

"Up the IRA, eh?"

"Jesus Christ, you think it's the right time for such jokes? I can't believe you would say that!"

"Alright, Mary, calm down, I didn't mean anything by it!"

"She's absolutely right, Thomas—"

"Ah Ma, not you too now—"

"It's beyond me how you could connect those hooligans to the Irish cause!"

"Coming from you! Like you weren't all cheering for 'those hooligans' some forty years ago!"

"Watch your tongue, now! Comparing that to this! And like I've ever been one to promote violence ..."

The sound of Nan's voice fades as I back out of the living room and go upstairs to my bedroom. I need some silence to sort my thoughts. As I sit on my bed it occurs to me why I know of Lyra McKee. She wrote a letter to her younger self when she was twenty-four years old. We read it in school in December in Mrs O'Neil's history class. She said it was off topic, but important. It dealt with self-acceptance and hope for a better future. She told us Lyra's other work dealt with pretty grim stuff, like suicide and the Troubles, and that it was too early for us to trouble ourselves with such things. I'm not sure if I was following the teacher's advice or just being lazy, but I never read it. Her letter was nice, though. I bet she was nice, too. Clever and

fun and the type of person who says whatever they want to, with no reservations, but it's all still sensible somehow. They said she had died because of a misfired shot. As if any shot is not.

Up until now I didn't make much of the disputes between the Catholics and the Protestants. Everyone knows that the English have it in for us, that their r's sound like they're opening their mouths at the doctor's and that they are generally to be disliked. Lots of people rant about England and how the North is part of the Republic, but I can't imagine them hurting anyone. Even my family makes constant jabs at the Protestants and the British. When my brother Stephen was leaving for England to study, Ma was filled to the brim with pride, but we all saw Nan was not happy about it. She would not say anything to her dear grandson of course, but after he left, there were times when she would throw in a remark about "our best people going to England" and that "folks should think about their homeland before going off to labour for the Crown." But she curses the nationalists just as much as the Protestants. Once, she took me to see the Bloody Sunday monument and she told me that we would get what's right with time, though nothing can be truly right if there is bloodshed over it. Borders don't matter once you're dead. She told me that when she was a child she heard stories about how Tans had tortured the Irish. How she never knew her grandad because he had been shot in the Easter Rising. How everyone was on their toes all the time when she was young and the Troubles were in full swing. How people killed and were killed for Ireland. The final badge of honour in the fight for freedom.

Old lady yakking, I thought. I got so annoyed with her for fidgeting about the past instead of thinking of the present. I never really took her seriously, either, thinking she just hadn't managed to get with the times. Looks like I might have been more oblivious to the present than Nan. I'm not sure, though. What happened today was because a few people wanted to play revolution, but I doubt the rest of the nation would be prepared to take up arms again. I don't think anyone wants to or sees the point of it. It was hard enough to create this relative state of peace, why threaten it to no avail?

But people probably don't adopt a war zone mentality until they find themselves close enough to the fire. I don't know how close that is, though. The Troubles may be over officially, but they are not altogether behind us – no matter how much we want to believe the opposite.



# *The Magic Bullet*

*by Andrej Navinec*

I was never the rebellious one, but I knew a man who was.

My family lived in the outskirts of Dublin and we weren't exactly poor, but not lavish or opulent either. If I had to rank us, we'd fall somewhere between the lower middle class and the self-proclaimed-want-to-be-high-class bootlickers. The ones who spend a fortune on their shirts and dresses just to befit the company of advocates and doctors, but who also struggle to afford to eat toasted bread with anything but a thin layer of blueberry marmalade.

My mother was a clerk in a shoe factory a few blocks away from our modestly furnished apartment, working from seven to three, from Monday to Friday, and my father worked in that same factory – that's how they met. All in all, our life wasn't even remotely bad, at least from a nine-year-old boy's perspective. But what did I know; all I needed was a football, a pair of sturdy shoes, and a piece of shepherd's pie with a glass of milk in the evening – and my mum took care of that.

Shoes were in abundance, since Father brought me a new pair every couple of weeks; either because one of the holes for shoelaces was missing, or the sole was a bit uneven at the heel. Of course that meant that the shoes couldn't be sold, but that didn't bother me – I was the boy with new shoes every ten days, and I guess that's the closest I ever got to being upper class.

I never had a reason to complain or to disobey my parents or teachers. I worked somewhat hard, got decent grades in school, and did all my work when required. I was especially good at grammar and Ms. Murphy, my schoolteacher, called me an 'exceptionally fast and precise reader' that one time, and I took great pride in that. I wasn't like the rest of the boys – restless, disobedient, and always looking for a way to mess with Ms. Murphy. I liked my books (especially the old ones), the newspapers that my father read, and the leaflets which the wind brought from the fish market down the street from our home. They were special in that respect that they all came from a specific fishmonger, Mr. Moriarty, and he was a witty old man. He would write funny remarks, which I later learned were called puns, on the leaflets to attract his customers. 'Something smells fishy, but not my trout or pike,' or 'This is a great oppor-tuna-ty to buy the best fish on the market,' and the way he used language to his advantage really dazzled me.

However, the real mystery to me wasn't English, but Gaelige – the old Irish language. I'd read about it, but I didn't know how to speak it and there was no way of learning it in Dublin. I knew that people still spoke it in the countryside, but even when I asked Ms. Murphy if she could help me, she disappointingly told me that as much as she wanted to, she unfortunately didn't know a word of Gaelige. And so I stuck to reading books by Maria Edgeworth, Jonathan Swift, and George Moore.

A few years passed by. When I was 14 Ireland beat Wales 2-0 – I remember the match because my dad took me there. I had finished grammar school and started going to secondary school where I soon picked up an extracurricular activity called 'Gaelic History'. We would read texts, stories, even recipes from the time when the majority of people in Ireland still spoke Gaelic, which was, as they explained to me, another name for Gaelige. Our group was small; only seven or eight other students regularly attended it, and that's why we could do a lot of work and take a look at piles of weird-looking, intricately written texts.

At first, I had no idea how to deal with the odd, unknown symbols that are the Gaelic language. But because our teacher, Mr. Jones, really wanted us to learn and like this language – he said it was because of the culture and the legacy it encompassed, which I didn't quite understand at the time – I soon got the hang of it. I would study the texts whenever I had the time, and I even started skipping football practice, which, to put it mildly, baffled my parents, since I wouldn't usually miss one even if both my knees were bloody and both my shins completely bruised.

Towards the end of the semester, Mr. Jones told us that he would select one of the students for an apprenticeship at an organization which dealt with preserving and promoting the old Irish language, which was, in his words, 'a national treasure and one of the fundamental elements of the Irish culture.' Just the thought of becoming a part of an organization like that sent shivers down my spine and my heart racing – this was the perfect opportunity for me to expand my linguistic interests and earn money while doing it. By the end of the semester, football practice had become a thing of the past, as I dedicated every spare moment to becoming fluent in Gaelic and understanding the history behind the old Irish texts.

The end of the year approached and so did the examination that would determine whether I would spend my summer slaving away in the shoe factory, separating faulty shoes from those worthy of being sold, or doing what I wanted to do in Mr. Jones' organization.

The day of the exam came and by then I had probably read every book in and on the Gaelic language available in the school library. I felt prepared and I knew that I was going to be chosen for the apprenticeship. I finished the test, handed it in, and waited until the end of the class. Mr. Jones said that he would let us know the results the following day.

I didn't sleep that night – that was really odd when I think about it now. A teenage boy with his entire life ahead of him, stressing over a position in an organization he didn't really know all that well. But it meant something to me. I knew it was the first step towards becoming a teacher or a linguist or a writer (I still had to work that out).

The next day, all the students gathered in front of the bulletin board in the main hall, anxiously waiting for Mr. Jones to announce our scores. He arrived at around 8:15 and posted the leaflet with the results. I immediately noticed that my score was high – 87 out of 100 points – but at first, I didn't notice that the next best score was 67. And that was when I knew I had passed the test with flying colors and that I would spend my summer working in an office, not in a dark warehouse. I turned to Mr. Jones, smiling at him, and he smiled back. It was a grin of approval, respect, and pride.

As the summer began, so did my apprenticeship. Both my parents were thrilled and happy for me, because they had realized that studying and exploring Gaelige meant the world to me. I started as an errand boy at the Gaelic League – that was the name of the organization. I would run from office to office, deliver mail, make notes of things that the people who worked there told me, make sure that the printers didn't run out of paper – the technical stuff, they told me. And I liked it, especially because every day I had half an hour to spend with the editors of the newspapers the organization would publish, learning from them, asking them what the deal in this organization was. And on one such occasion I met the man.

He was the main editor of our newspaper *The Sword of Light* and he was not much older than me – with his stubble and a short haircut he seemed about the age of the boys in the higher classes of the secondary school that I went to. He was different from the others; more energetic, more indulged, more engaged in all this 'revival of the true Irish language' as he often addressed the goal of the Gaelic League. I learned that he had been interested in the Gaelic language from an early age just like me. He was around the same age as me when he first joined the Gaelic League, and since the first day he had been working towards his only goal – the freedom of the Irish and their language.

I also learned that he had finished his studies in English, French, and Irish at the Royal University of Dublin prior to coming to work as the chief newspaper editor in the organization. Not only that, he also took the bar exam and became a lawyer. The words that I heard being used around the premises of the Gaelic League to describe the man were ‘radical,’ ‘a nationalist,’ ‘a loyalist,’ and also ‘insane’ and ‘delusional.’

At the time, I could not comprehend what was so special about him, but that soon changed. He became my mentor, or at least I considered him to be one. He saw his younger self in me and he took the time out of his day to explain to me the idea of the Irish nation, the British oppression, and his dream of making Ireland independent one day – to make it a republic. I had a hard time connecting all the dots as I didn’t know much about politics and the problematics revolving around the Irish national identity, but I was eager to learn. I was taught about the history of Ireland, the terrors of the British rule, the failed rebellion of 1798, and about the injustice that had befallen the Irish. I saw the fire in his eyes and I knew he would go on to become someone great. But then, one day, he was gone.

By the time I heard of him again I had already finished secondary school and began a new chapter of my life, one in the groves of academia. I had started my studies in college as a student of literature and political sciences. I had been active in the Gaelic League and I had always strived to follow my mentor’s guidance, diligently working towards the goals that he had bestowed upon me. I could never have imagined that someone could have the ability to influence a human being in that kind of way. By no means had I become some radical nationalist with a deeply rooted hatred for the Crown, but I realized how unique and special the Irish nation and its language were.

In the second year of my college endeavors, one of my classes announced a visiting professor lecture from St. Enda’s School – a secondary school for boys, as I learned later. I didn’t think much of it, but I had always had a liking for guest lecturers from other schools and colleges – now that I think about it, I enjoyed being lectured to, and I feel that the experience and knowledge of those lecturers really influenced me.

Anyway, when the lecturer came to the podium, I couldn’t believe my eyes; it was the same man who had taught me about the beauties of Ireland. I felt overcome with happiness. It was as if I were reunited with an old friend after a long time, although he probably didn’t even remember me. He began explaining to us the importance of the Irish heritage and how valuable

the old Irish language was. His voice was strong, confident, convincing – even more so than I remembered. He lectured with passion, guided by an invisible force that could be felt in his words and the melody of his speech. His eyes glimmered as he explained how he had decided to open a school intended for boys who wanted to learn both languages spoken in Ireland. To be quite frank, I wasn't surprised that he would have gone to such lengths to keep Irish Gaelic alive and flourishing.

By the end of his speech I felt revitalized, bursting with energy, and happy - as if I had received the necessary boost and guidance to steer my life in the right direction once again. Not that I had derailed in any way; it was simply a refreshing experience to listen to the man who had helped me become who I still was, and am even today. It was a shame that, besides a few questions, I didn't have an opportunity to talk to him. It would have been nice to ask him how he was doing and thank him – I felt that I had missed an opportunity.

I graduated after a while. I became a teacher of English and history. I met a beautiful girl and married her. She is cheerful, caring, sensual, and also a teacher. We have two children: Keith and Fiona. They are my treasure and the reason I wake up in the morning, day after day. I focused on teaching children, telling them what English was like, what Irish was like, and what Ireland was like. I taught them what I felt was important and I tried to persuade them to love the land and the language that embraced them.

I admit, my Gaelic got worse and I don't read as many books as I did when I was younger. I might have lost some of that fire that has burned in me since I joined the Gaelic League, but I never forgot who I was, where I belonged, and what my history was – what our history was. I remember who took the time to explain the things that I was interested in, who sat down with me and taught me what it meant to be Irish.

Even though I hadn't spoken to him since that lecture in the second year of college, I was there when he read the Proclamation of the Irish Republic on Easter Monday in 1916. I was there when they rebelled; I listened to the guns and the tanks and I was there when the English quelled the rebellion. I was there when they gathered the leaders of the rebellion and sat them in front of a wall, kneeling, blindfolded. I heard the shots and I saw him fall – cold, dead, but proud.

I was never the rebellious one, but I knew a man who was – I knew Patrick Pearse.



# “Cockles! Mussels! Alive, alive-o!”

*by Veronika Mikec*

The sound of shutters being opened scared the crow sitting on the windowsill, where it had found shelter from the storm the night before. The town was waking up to a dewy September morning – it had been lashing down for a few days now, and the water had been standing in the crevices between the grotty cobblestone. The puddles changed the appearance of Dublin streets to those of the swampy areas in County Donegal up north, where the rebellion of that pitiful scoundrel O’Doherty took place about nine decades earlier. The muddy roads made it harder for hawkers to begin their day, but as the foredoomed, poverty-ridden heroine of this short tale had as much choice as she had money, Miss Molly Malone wheeled her cart through Eustace Street, crying, as if for dear life, “Cockles! Mussels! Alive, alive-o!”

She held these grimy days in disfavour, knowing that it was no use waking at such an early hour to sell fish, as most Dubliners were still in their beds. She desired nothing more but to have the pleasure of not having to push this old wain around, it getting stuck at every turn. She should have got married to the old fellow all those years ago when she was but a child. Had she done that, she would now be situated at the beautiful Rosshill estate, maybe playing with the children she had always wanted, or perhaps reading those books she once saw when her mother took her to the big library in Grantham when they went to pay a visit to Molly’s eldest aunt.

Unfortunately, all that sweet Molly was, was a six-and-twenty-year-old spinster whose arms hurt so badly she could now hardly write letters to her folks in Howth – oh, how she missed them! Molly thought, *Oh, I would much rather spend rainy days like today with my ma and pa, we could do so much! I would much rather sell fish back home!*

But Miss Malone was now living near Thomas Street in Dublin, where she and Miss Elizabeth Browne (who, by-the-by, was to be wed to John Bermingham of Kellbrack this coming spring) shared an apartment in the attic, barely big enough for the two of them.

This was poor Molly’s sorrowful existence; knowing whatever future she may have will be nowhere near as agreeable as her childhood in the village of Howth. And how saddened I am to say her premonitions were correct.

“Ay, Molly! Got any of them flounders today?”

She looked over her bare left shoulder (her dress was worn-out, constantly slipping down to her collarbones), then her right, locating the voice calling her name. (Which had not been given to her by her parents, mind you – her name was Mary, but since the people of Dublin, where she had now been living for seven years, did not bother remembering it, she could not be bothered correcting them.) Finally noticing a man of ample proportions and about fifty years of age, she recognised one Mr O’Callaghan – it could have been no one else, you see, as Mr O’Callaghan was one of those folks the entire town knew. His nose had long ago acquired a deep tint of red that spread across the apples of his cheeks from spending his nights at the local pubs. Miss Malone turned her cart and wheeled it a few steps back.

“They’re not in season,” she snarked, not too enthusiastic to again be wasting her time conversing with Mr O’Callaghan, who continued his scrutinising, ignoring Molly’s answer to his previous inquiry.

“You smell of fish, Mollers.”

“Well, I do sell fish for a living, don’t I?”

He chuckled, bending over her cart and picking up a foul-smelling bass.

“Them cats are still following you, I see?” he said, pointing with the dead fish at the clowder of dirty, raggedy strays.

Again ignoring his clumsy attempts at small talk, she took the bass out of his hands. “You buying any fish? I got places to be and have no time to chit-chat, especially with you, Mr O’Callaghan.”

“I don’t need no fish, Miss Malone,” grinned Mr O’Callaghan. “I know you go ’round Eustace Street this time ’a day, and I *was* decided on waiting until you came by Ó Dubhghaill’s, but I really do need to ask you one thing, Mollers.”

She gave him a puzzled look.

“Was it you, by any chance,” continued the man, “whom I saw sneaking in one of the alleyways of Montgomery Street yesterday night?”

“Think what you will,” sighed Molly after pausing a little and carefully considering her answer. She disliked Mr O’Callaghan’s asking her about Montgomery Street, for it was an inexcusable shame to be in any way connected to it, it being located in a particular area of Dublin. Those days, the district had come to be known as Monto, and although not many people dared to

pass its streets, rumours told of gatherings of depraved women exchanging their holy bodies for a few pennies, luring drunken men into disease-infested rooms. Molly, although entirely aware of these rumours, decided against quarrelling with Mr O'Callaghan, as she had better start making sales. She tried pushing the cart around Mr O'Callaghan's wide frame, which seemed to be gravely larger each time Miss Malone was graced by his presence. The townspeople were saying Mr O'Callaghan had long been suffering from corpulence due to his excessive love of wine drinking. He had a habit of calling these same people asses and cretins – needless to say, he wasn't much of a scholar.

“Don't fret, dear Molly. I know exactly what to think of you,” he smirked, walking up the street still looking at her. Miss Malone could have sworn she heard him call her a whore under his breath, and regretted not having told him to wind his neck in. But having more important matters to tend to, she wheeled her wain in the opposite direction, shouting, “Cockles! Mussels! Alive, alive-o!”

There were few people out at this time of day, although Molly couldn't comprehend exactly why. No one but the town drunk, Mr Yorkstone, could be seen wandering Dublin's streets. His shoes were looking rather shabby, as the pitiable old man took all his earnings to Flanigan's each week, spending it all on cheap liquor. One thing he did know, however, was how to sing. And sing he did, every time he locked eyes with Miss Malone. He did not know her and she did not know him, but his love was pure and often expressed in song:

*In Dublin's fair city  
Where the girls are so pretty  
I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone  
As she wheeled her wheelbarrow  
Through the streets broad and narrow  
Crying “cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh”  
Alive, alive, oh  
Alive, alive, oh  
Crying “cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh”*

Molly paid little attention to the drunkard, knowing damn well his tunes were sung to every fair maiden passing his way. Miss Malone was not aware, however, that singing to and about her was Mr Yorkstone's dearest part of the day (excluding the drinking, naturally) – not to be mistaken, he did sing to every non-hideous looking lady, but his heart still did yearn for none other but Miss Malone. She, on the other hand, had fish to sell.

Hours passed and day was turning to night, but Miss Malone didn't sell much fish. Seeing how much slower business was than usual, she felt bad for Mr Tom O'Donnell, her tranter – she reckoned poor Tommy must have got up at three o'clock that morning to deliver the fresh fish to Dublin all the way from Howth. She paused here, longing for her home, knowing she might never see it again. Sad thing was, she never would.

Molly dragged her cart back home, dropping the fish in a nearby pile of trash. Upon entering the apartment, she was surprised to find Miss Browne scrubbing the floors with an eagerness she had never seen her do anything with. Immediately she desired to know the purpose of her doing.

"I've forgotten to tell you, haven't I? Oh, you know what I'm like! Anywho, my brother Peter has written to let me know he is coming to visit to-morrow! I was decided on paying him a visit later this autumn, but with all the wedding preparations I entirely forgot about arranging a meeting. Now I am committing myself to get this place in its utmost clean shape!"

"You silly girl," laughed Molly and helped Elizabeth on her feet.

"Oh! Speaking of my relations, how is your brother doing, Molly?"

Miss Malone did not answer this simple question. Instead, she began rubbing her eyes and claimed tiredness, explaining how she wasn't feeling well. In actuality, Miss Malone was trying to avoid being asked about her brother back in Howth; she hadn't seen him in years, and last she heard, he wasn't doing well – admittedly, he was in worse condition each day.

"Will you be going out to-night as well?" asked Molly's friend, quickly changing the subject of conversation, recalling that inquiring after her brother's health was unsought for, as it nearly always brought Miss Malone's spirits down.

"Yes, and this time, Lizzy – this time – it will be my last time. This night's client is offering me an amount of fifty pounds – yes, you heard correctly – an amount of *fifty* pounds to do the job. I don't think I will ever have to sell fish again, Lizzy! I will move back to my folks' to help my brother. And I will visit you and Mr Bermingham often! Oh, Lizzy, I am so glad."

The two friends reflected on the fortune smiling upon Molly's fate, having eaten the last bit of their dinner. It was off to bed for Elizabeth and time for Miss Malone to head out.

*Mr O'Callaghan was correct*, Molly thought as the hour of the meeting drew nearer. She was indeed heading to Montgomery Street, where Mr O'Callaghan, and possibly many others, had seen her the previous night. She had been sure her visits to Monto had passed unnoticed; in fear of being recognised, Molly had put on a dark woollen cloak, which Elizabeth's mother had gifted her a year prior, before heading out the door.

"They mustn't recognise me," she muttered under her breath while walking through a narrow passage underneath an archway. She felt the harsh wind blowing directly into her face; in fear of losing the bonnet serving as a disguise, she held onto it tightly, preventing it from being blown away. Hardly could she see the path before her, as the dark clouds rolled across the sky, hiding the full moon and its light – it was sheer luck Miss Malone could walk the way to Monto with her eyes closed, having been there on numerous occasions. It wasn't in her favour to make these trips in a weather so dismal, but to-night was different – she felt shivers all over her body which were not caused by the frigid wind – she imagined it was nervousness.

Arriving at the usual meeting spot, Malone leaned on the brick wall and hesitantly looked around. She was rather anxiously awaiting the arrival of a stranger whom she'd never met and had only communicated with through letters. It could not have been more than ten minutes later that she saw a figure walking up to her.

"Are you the miss of name Kavanagh?" asked the stranger.

Although you and I both know, dear reader, what Molly's real name was, there was a good reason why she nodded at the question – you see, an alias was dreadfully needed when one decided on extending their repertoire in shady streets like these, and it was no different for our dear Miss Malone – pardon, Miss Kavanagh. She could not take a risk lest her services should be exposed. Miss Malone was very careful come these matters, as practicing abortion was to be charged with witchcraft and the woman was to be burned at the stake, exactly like that Dame Alice Kyteler of Kilkenny's servant Petronilla had been more than three-hundred years ago.

"I am Letitia Vernon, wife of Reverend Edward Vernon, who is never to know of our meeting. Should he find out, he is certain to abandon and ostracise me, and I will not succumb to living on the streets once again."

*A bit of a hostile approach*, thought Molly Malone, debating whether meeting the woman standing in front of her was ever a smart idea.

“Well? Let’s get on with it!”

Rushed by the nervousness of Mrs Vernon, Molly hurried upstairs, showing the woman into the room where she had taken all of her previous clients. Monto was the perfect place to help these women who fell with a child at unfortunate times, without any of them being recognised, as no one but the prostitutes (who, for the most part, kept to themselves) and their clients dared to pass this part of Dublin at night.

Now, as to not upset the reader, the procedure Molly was already accustomed to along with its gory details will not be described in this account, it not being for the faint of heart.

Once finished, she advised Mrs Vernon to rest for an hour or two in order not to feel sickness on her way back – she would keep her company should the missus decide on staying. Mrs Vernon accepted, and encouraged Miss Kavanagh (as only she knew her) to kindly take the basket she had brought with herself. In it, Molly would find the promised sum of money, and some food and wine to thank her for her honourable deed.

Once the advised two hours passed and Mrs Vernon took off into the night, Malone took with her the gifts, excited to share the treats with her dear friend Elizabeth.

The morning after, Miss Browne awoke to the smell of freshly baked bread. She stood in disbelief in front of the table where Molly sat smiling at her, inviting her to sit down. She informed Lizzy of the events that had transpired the previous night and proposed a toast, already pouring the wine she had been given the preceding evening. Having tasted it, they both wished for a sip of this delicacy every day – it was divine, by far the best they’d ever had! After drinking a few drops more, Miss Elizabeth announced she was heading out this morning to deal with some wedding matters and later meeting her brother, leaving Miss Malone in the apartment. Molly was now no longer worried about selling fish and decided to stay at home and read. Perhaps she would write a letter to her folks and arrange a visit – she was ecstatic, and for the first time in a long time she was looking forward to the next day.

Trouble struck once Lizzy returned home a few hours later to find her flatmate lying in bed, sweating. Molly, assuring her it was a mere cold she had caught wandering the streets late at night, asked her to bring her some chamomile tea and leave her be, as to prevent catching

something herself. Elizabeth did as Molly asked and spent the rest of her evening embroidering a handkerchief she was to give her soon-to-be husband. Making the last few stitches at half past one in the morning, she blew out the candle and headed to bed after checking up on Molly. Seeing her friend sleeping soundly, she calmly crawled into her own bed and soon fell asleep.

What Molly and Elizabeth didn't know, though, was the full story behind Mrs Vernon's having an abortion. You see, her story was that of going from rags to riches, and it was her marriage to Mr Vernon that had brought her out of poverty. Should you think she was willing to forfeit her assets by giving birth to a son, you would be gravely mistaken – by staying childless, she ensured herself to inherit all her husband's fortune. So, as to not risk Molly telling her husband about the abortion, before packing the wine, Mrs Vernon enriched it with arsenic (*poudre de succession*, the French call it) used by her servants to kill rats.

Miss Malone was only a month short of her birth day when she passed.

"All of you called me nuts when I said she was a hoor, although I was never sure why people were willing to pay for her services up at Monto. I know I never would have," snarked one of the men in Ó Dubhghaill's, talking about Molly who had been found dead two days ago, and was now more than ever rumoured to have been a prostitute. Her death, ruled that of a fever, had become the subject of town gossip that week.

"I never thought her much of a looker."

"I wouldn't know about that, Mr O'Callaghan," replied Mr MacColgan, pausing a little. "One thing I do know is that she always did have the freshest fish in all of Dublin. And she always was very kind, I suppose."

Laughing, Mr O'Callaghan thought to himself of when he last saw Molly Malone. He didn't care about her, not at all. But there was an inexplicable emptiness inside of him, and it dawned on him in that instant.

"Get me another pint, Rowan," he exclaimed.

A few days after hearing of Molly's death, Lizzy tried drowning her sorrows of losing Molly with the same bottle of wine that had doomed her unfortunate friend. Miss Elizabeth was only lucky the first time around when drinking the arsenic, and it was only seven months before her wedding day when she passed. Her fiancé arranged a burial near her hometown up north, a long way from where Malone was buried.

To calm the reader's probable anger, it fits to say that despite Mrs Vernon's endeavours, she gave birth to a daughter only two years following Miss Malone's death. Not long after, Mr Vernon celebrated the birth of his first son, John Vernon, while also having to mourn the death of Mrs Vernon, who died in childbirth. Two decades later, John ended up inheriting a fortune after his father's demise. He decided to give half his inheritance to his sister Catherine, not being particularly interested in money – and yet they claim the apple does not fall far from the tree...

Weeks passed, so did months, and the folks at old fair Dublin slowly forgot about the cheeky fishmonger that had strolled through their city not so long ago. Not even a poorly crafted tombstone with an inscription was ever made to keep the memory of the young woman alive. However, this was not unforeseen; our wretched yet beloved Molly Malone, although known by many, was a friend to few. And such was her fate to be forgotten like many before her.

Not everyone did forget about sweet Molly, though. Mr Yorkstone remembered her, and so did her brother moments before he passed; how could they forget?

For many centuries since, if the weary traveller walking through the city of Dublin takes notice and listens carefully, he or she can hear woeful tunes still being sung about Miss Malone:

*She died of a fever  
And no one could save her  
And that was the end of sweet Molly Malone*



# *Niamh and the Magical Violin*

*by Kaja Peršolja*

Once upon a time, in a little town by the name of Birr, lived a girl named Niamh. There was absolutely nothing special about her, or at least nothing that could be described as out of the ordinary. Every day Niamh would wake up, eat breakfast, say goodbye to her parents and walk to school.

It was her favourite part of the day – walking to school, that is. She loved to walk alongside the river and look at the trees which grew along the riverbank. Her mother had warned her many times not to walk that way on her own, but Niamh never listened. Not being able to see how the sunlight made the water sparkle late in the afternoon was something she could not imagine. She always thought her parents should let her have at least this little bit of fun, since they were forcing her to take violin lessons with that ghastly woman Mrs MacGee. Niamh had never hated anything in her life more than she hated playing violin. She was certain that nothing could ever persuade her to think otherwise.

It was a beautiful spring day and Niamh was walking home from her lesson. There was a frown on her face yet again, as Mrs MacGee had insisted she stay longer because she simply was not improving as much as the other children. No matter how much she practised, she just was not good enough. There was no way out since her parents would not let her quit.

Soon, Niamh reached her favourite part of the path and a smile finally made its way onto her face. To any other person, the river would have probably seemed quite ordinary, but not to Niamh. She thought it looked more beautiful than the day before and even the day before that. It made her happy again.

As Niamh started humming her favourite tune, her pace quickened and became lively. The arm in which she held her violin case started swinging as her steps became leaps and her walking turned into skipping. She twirled around and giggled. It only took another twirl for her grip to loosen and before she could do anything about it, her violin case was already tumbling down the hill and, in the end, landed in the river.

Time stopped. She could not move; she could not speak. Even if she had wanted to get her case back, she wouldn't have been able to reach it. Her mind was buzzing as it tried to find

a possible solution for this terrible accident. She sat down under a tree and leaned her forehead against her knees, helpless.

The sun was slowly setting, but Niamh just sat there, as though frozen in time. The birds in the trees had gone quiet. As the wind ruffled Niamh's hair one last time before vanishing, a troubling thought crossed her mind. *My parents must be wondering where I am.*

She slowly stood up and looked around one more time, hoping someone would come by to help her. There was no one in sight as far as the eye could see. When she turned away from the river and started walking home again, she began to feel a heaviness in her heart. The river no longer looked beautiful and neither did the nature around her. All the colours seemed bleak and minutes seemed as long as hours.

"Where were you, Niamh? Mrs MacGee said you'd left hours ago. Your father and I were worried about you!" yelled her mother as she came rushing to the door.

"I'm sorry. I lost track of time," said Niamh, her head bowed.

"Are you okay, love? What happened?"

"Nothing, Mum. I'm just a bit tired, that's all."

"Where's your violin?"

The question caught Niamh off guard. "Um... I – I left it behind. At Mrs MacGee's, I mean."

"I thought we agreed you'd bring it home after your lessons. You know you need to practise, Niamh."

"I know, Mum. I'm sorry."

"Well, there's no need to worry about it now. There's dinner waiting for you on the table," said Niamh's mother and kissed the top of her daughter's head.

That night, Niamh lay awake in her bed. Her body wanted to drift away into a deep and much needed sleep, but her mind would not let her. Tossing around in her bed didn't seem to help either. As hours passed, her eyelids became heavy and weariness finally got the best of her.

Something woke her up in the middle of the night. An odd noise was coming from the garden behind the house. It was as though raindrops had turned into diamonds or ice and were falling from the sky, creating a beautiful harmony. The sound of thousands of tiny bells ringing was coming from the distance. Niamh had never heard such a sound before. She got up and steadily approached the window overlooking the garden.

She couldn't see anything at first. Suddenly, a shimmering light in the far-left corner of the garden caught her eye. The light surrounded the dark figure of a person. Whoever they were, they were standing completely still.

Now, a normal child would have climbed back under their blanket in a situation like this, but not Niamh. She put on her slippers, grabbed her coat and a flashlight, and ran down the stairs and out the back door. Her heart was pounding. There were only a few feet between her and the mysterious person now.

"Who are you?"

Niamh's voice was shaking, but she did not want to appear afraid. In that very moment, one figure turned into three. Niamh took a step back and looked up. Two men and a woman were now towering over her.

"Do you not know us, child?" said the beautiful woman dressed in white.

Niamh shook her head.

"We've come to help you. We know of the things that are, the things that were, the things that will be, those that are lost and those that are found," said the old man on her left.

"I do not understand."

"I am Brigid," said the woman.

"I am Dagda," proclaimed the old man.

"I am Lugh!" exclaimed the young and handsome man dressed as a warrior.

"We are *Tuatha Dé Danann*, the gods of your ancestors, who used to inhabit this heavenly land. We have been watching over it and her people for a very long time, *Cailín beag*. Now we have come to watch over you."

"Am I in danger?" asked Niamh, slightly frightened.

"You have lost something, have you not?"

Niamh took a deep breath and looked at the old god, wide-eyed. "Can you help me? Can you bring back my violin?"

"Yes, child. But you must do something first."

"Anything," said Niamh excitedly.

"You must tell us why people need music."

His request left her baffled. How could she possibly answer a question like that? After all, she could not have cared less about music. To her, music meant violin and she hated the violin. Music was something that simply existed, like water... or air.

"I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand your question," was the best reply Niamh could come up with at that moment.

"You see, Brigid, Lugh and I have been in conflict over this question for centuries. You now have the opportunity and, more importantly, the honour, to end our dispute for good," explained the old man. "I believe that music is very similar to magic. It is power and it is a weapon. Just look at everything I have achieved with my harp."

"I believe music exists to serve its one true purpose – to entertain people and bring out their true feelings – not to strike them down or doom them, as the old man says," replied Lugh.

"Do not listen to them, child. They do not know what they are saying," intervened Brigid. "Music is beauty. It lives inside every person. It is in their birth, their life and their death. True music, of course, lies in a person's voice."

Niamh looked at the gods in front of her, who were now engaged in a heated argument.

"Excuse me?" said Niamh quietly. The gods were still arguing.

"I'm sorry... Excuse me!" she raised her voice. They turned their heads towards her.

"Why can't music be all of those things? I mean, it can be power, fun and beauty. It can move mountains by conveying messages and telling stories that would otherwise have stayed unheard; it can be fun when it allows us to dance and sing along; it can also be beautiful, when it comes from the deepest corners of our hearts and pushes us to create true works of art. It is like a language without boundaries – everyone can understand it. Music is something that has always been, is and always will be because it lives inside us as well as around us."

The gods looked at each other in silence. Dagda took a step in the direction of the nearest tree and reached towards it. Surprisingly, the rough surface of the large trunk did not stop Dagda's hand. Instead, his fingers went through and reached into the very core of the tree, as if to tear out its heart. The opening in the tree shone even brighter than the gods and when Dagda pulled out his hand, Niamh noticed that it was no longer empty.

Right there, in Dagda's hand, was a beautiful violin. Lugh reached for a branch and fashioned a bow out of it with his bare hands. As Brigid started to sing, a single twig of ivy from a nearby wall wrapped itself around the instrument and sank into it, leaving a beautiful pattern

on the surface of the wood. She held the instrument in her hands, and as the last few notes of the song left her lips, she handed the violin to Niamh. Just as the gods had appeared, so they disappeared in a flash of light, leaving nothing but the darkness of the night behind.

The next day, Niamh decided to take her new violin to Mrs MacGee's. She managed to sneak it past her parents without them noticing and was determined to try it out. This violin was nothing like her previous one – it was as light as a feather. Her fingers were no longer clumsy and were now gliding smoothly across the strings. When it was her turn to play and all the attention was directed towards her, it no longer annoyed or frightened her. Everyone in the room was under her spell. They never wanted her to stop playing. They never wanted to stop listening to this divine music...

“Niamh!”

A voice was coming from the distance. It was quiet at first, but it became louder each time the person said her name.

“Niamh!”

The voice would not stop.

“Niamh, darling! It's time to wake up. You'll be late for school.”

Her mother was there, sitting on her bed, holding her by the shoulders, shaking the dream away.

Niamh opened her eyes and sat up on the bed. “Mum, I just had the strangest dream.” She could have sworn they were real. It confused her.

“Really?” asked her mother with a smile. “You'll tell me about it in the car. Get dressed now; breakfast is waiting for you in the kitchen.”

Her mother gave her a hug and left the room. Niamh got up and looked through the window. It was raining and their garden was completely empty.

*Maybe it really was a dream*, she thought to herself. Just like every day, she got dressed, had breakfast, grabbed her bag, put on her shoes and set out to wait in the car.

But that day, Niamh opened the front door and stepped out, only to find a beautiful ivy-patterned violin waiting for her at the door.



# *The Story of the Island*

*by Nina Kremenžar*

You might have been told stories of fairies, and leprechauns, and giants, and ghosts. You might also have been told that all of these creatures don't actually exist. And you might have believed it. Indeed, it is true. The creatures don't exist. Not anymore, at least. But they did.

Ages ago, when the highest mountains hadn't risen yet and the seas were still wilder and blacker, the northernmost lands of the world used to be home to the most wonderful and vicious creatures you can think of. There lived the tallest giants, the most beautiful fairies, mischievous leprechauns, all kinds of ghosts and animals, and so many other beings I can't begin to count them. All of them were very much alive and very much real. But then, quite suddenly, they all disappeared, never to be seen again. This is a story of those times.

A long time ago, there used to be a small village by the northern sea. In a small wooden house lived a girl called Ailis and her mother. They took care of their chickens and sheep, grew herbs and vegetables, and lived happily and in peace. But then Ailis' mother fell sick and died. They buried her on a spring Sunday in the village cemetery. After the funeral, Ailis refused to go home. For six nights she lay next to the grave and cried for her beloved mother. The villagers brought her food and drink, but she hardly touched it. By the seventh day, Ailis had grown so weak that she could barely move. She couldn't even cry anymore; she lay motionless with her eyes closed, only her chest rising and falling with each shallow breath.

Nightfall came. Ailis was still curled by her mother's grave when a figure stepped out of the shadows of the graveyard. It was a young, tall, and handsome man. His face was white and his eyes were dark and kind. He slowly approached Ailis and gently bent over her.

"Ailis," he said softly. "Get up."

Ailis raised her gaze. "How do you know my name?"

"I heard you crying. My name is Sean." He offered Ailis his hand, but she ignored it.

"What do you want from me?" she asked.

"I wish to help you."

"You can't help me," she said.

“Of course I can. I can grant you a wish. What is it that your heart desires?” asked Sean.

“My mother.” Ailis’ voice shook.

“That is easy,” smiled Sean. “But there is always a small price to pay for a wish.”

“What price?” said Ailis, sitting up, the shadow of sadness lifting from her face.

“Nothing much, really. If you come help me until the seasons turn twice, I will bring your mother back to you.”

“Can you really do that?” Ailis asked.

“Of course. Can’t you tell? I come from the land of fairies and I can do all sorts of magic. If you agree to come with me.” Sean offered Ailis his hand one more time, and this time the girl took it and let him help her to her feet.

“What would I have to do if I came with you?” Ailis asked, but her eyes glittered with hope already.

“Oh, just some easy work. You’d help me in the garden and with the animals, do some cooking and cleaning perhaps, and some weaving and knitting. Everything a smart girl like you is skillful at, I’m sure.”

Sean’s voice sounded calm and reassuring. And he was right; Ailis could do all of those things. Seeing her mother again was all she could think of.

“Just two turns of the seasons and you’ll have your mother back. What do you say?” Sean made two steps forward, still holding Ailis’ hand. His eyes were smiling and Ailis followed him.

Sean led her down the path from her village, over the hills, and up north. They walked for a long time, but Ailis didn’t get tired at all. Sean gave her food and water that tasted funnily sweet, and before she knew it, they were standing on a narrow piece of land that stretched far into the sea. Ailis didn’t recognize the surroundings, and the further they walked, the more she knew she wouldn’t be able to find her way out of this land alone.

“Welcome to my home,” Sean said when they entered the small hut where he lived. It was messy and dirty, but also warm and cozy. Sean showed Ailis her bed and let her get to work.

For the next two years, Ailis lived well. She worked from morning till evening, feeding Sean’s goats and dogs, plucking weeds, spinning thread and weaving cloth, cleaning the floors, cooking soup and meat, building the fire, and drying herbs. It was hard work, but the hut was clean, her bed was warm, she had food, and every day she was closer to being reunited with her

mother. Time went by fast, but Ailis noticed that spring hadn't yet turned into summer. Still, when two years passed, she went to Sean to ask about her mother.

Sean laughed and she saw malice in his face for the first time. "You stupid girl. Two years? What are you talking about? You agreed to work for me until the seasons turned twice. And the spring hasn't even begun to turn into summer."

"But when will it?" asked Ailis in disbelief.

"Well, let's see. If I count in human years, in about a year."

Ailis stared into Sean's wicked face. He turned uglier; she could swear his skin became darker and his face wrinkled.

"You tricked me?" she whispered.

"I did no such thing!" he smirked. "If you forgot to ask how quickly time passes in Fairyland, well then, that is on you, isn't it?"

Ailis was devastated. After that, her life became worse and worse. Sean turned into a hairy, ugly, fat, and evil creature that didn't look like a human at all. He made her work harder, he took away her bed, and more often than not refused her any food. In the night, when she slept curled up on the bare floor, Sean would sneak up and force himself on her. When she gave birth to the first child, she almost bled to death. She bore him twelve children and each delivery was as excruciating as the first one. All of the children were born bigger and hairier than possible for any human child, but she nursed them and cared for them as any mother would have.

However, when the children turned twelve months old, strange creatures appeared on the doorstep of their hut. They handed Sean a bag of coins and Sean handed them a child. One by one, Ailis' children were sold to bearded creatures or women with pig heads.

More than once, Ailis tried to escape. She sneaked out during the night, but because she could never find the right road leading out of the land, Sean caught her, dragged her back to the hut, and beat her senseless.

Sean didn't sell only her children; he traded in all kinds of goods with all kinds of people, and the hut was soon filled with bottles, potions, packets, and amulets, which Ailis wasn't allowed to touch. Because of Sean's trading, Ailis saw all kinds of creatures that lived in Fairyland – giants, leprechauns, and even clurichauns. Fairies didn't do much business with Sean, but they often passed the hut in the evening when Ailis was carrying water or chopping wood. Ailis looked at their gorgeous faces with awe, jealousy, and anger. She sometimes even saw ghosts at

the edge of the forest or heard the distant singing of creatures she had never seen before. But nobody noticed her, nobody helped her, and she never dared ask.

The seasons kept turning with infinite slowness. Two dozen years passed and Ailis turned into an old, tired, and hopeless woman. The memory of her mother became just a part of a distant life and it only brought her sadness whenever she thought of it, because so very often she believed she would die before the seasons turned twice. She had almost forgotten the promise Sean had given her, but then one spring day, she passed the old tree in front of the hut and, like any other day, she slid her hand along its bark.

But then she suddenly stopped. She had carved small lines into the tree and stroked them every single day, so the skin of her hand had turned each and every one into a memory, a reminder of Sean's promise. Each line represented a day she had spent in Fairyland. And that day, she realized as she was looking at the ragged bark of the tree, was the exact day that Sean had brought her there twenty-four years prior. She thought of her mother and her heart leapt with joy.

She walked up to the evil, old creature. "Today, the seasons have turned twice. You will fulfill your promise. You will bring me my mother and free me of this bondage."

Sean looked at her, but there was no trace of nervousness or remorse in his face. Only the familiar spiteful look.

"As you wish," he said and disappeared.

Ailis waited half a day for him to return and when he did, he was carrying a linen bag. There was no sign of Ailis' mother.

"Where is my mother?" she asked.

"Here she is," said Sean, grinning. He opened the bag and turned it inside out.

White bones fell to the ground. Ailis was left speechless.

"You never said you wanted her alive." Sean laughed so hard he dropped to his knees.

Ailis felt her body tremble with rage; her hands and face turned hot, and there was a ringing in her ears so loud she thought her head would explode. She screamed. She screamed so loud the ground beneath her started shaking. Her voice filled the land and echoed with such force that the trees in the forest bent, roofs were lifted from houses, and the wind swirled. The rumbling in the ground grew stronger as Ailis' scream became louder and louder. The roads

cracked, the hills crumbled, the rivers rose. The last thing Ailis saw was Sean's face – and it was terrified.

Then the world shook one last time and fell apart. The sea rose, the rocks tumbled, and Fairyland broke away from the northern part of the old lands and drifted into the sea.

No living creature was left on the island. No sign of Sean or Ailis or any other Fairyland creature. Grass covered the hills and the trees grew green again, but the names of the creatures were almost forgotten. It took a long time and many turnings of the seasons before a man crossed the sea and set foot on the island that used to be Fairyland. But the humans did come and they made themselves a new home. Little remains of those times. Maybe you'll find an old tree with ragged bark if you search very closely. Or perhaps, if you sit very quietly by the shores of the island on a calm spring evening, you might hear a whimper.

That's Ailis' scream dying out. It's still there, they say. If you listen.



# Guinness

*by Nina Jazbec*

13 October 1749

Dear Diary!

Nothing important happened today. I went about my usual day: I had breakfast with Aileen early in the morning while our children were still sound asleep, I spent the rest of the day at work and I've just come home now. It is quite late, Cara and Brín are asleep again and I think I need to crawl into bed, too, because tomorrow is going to be a busy day – winter is nearing, and I have to go and collect some wood from the forest so we will be able to get through the upcoming cold nights.

14 October 1749

Dear Diary!

I wish I had hugged Cara and Brín before I left in the morning.

I had gone to the woods a million times before, but this time it was different.

It all started when I was packing for the day. I didn't need a lot of things with me. I packed some food in a bundle, put on my working gloves and boots. I took an axe and a saw, put them both on a wood-stacking sledge, which makes it easier to transport bigger amounts of wood, and headed to the forest.

It was a beautiful day. I started my journey so early in the morning that I had the chance of witnessing the sunrise, and it was majestic – the colours from dimmed yellow to a shade of purple danced across the sky. The landscape around me was bathing in orange light, birds were chirping their morning melodies and nature was waking up. I really enjoy moments like this, and the four-hour walk was more than pleasurable.

I decided to go to a different forest than the one I would usually go to. I figured I could change up my routine a little bit. As soon as I reached the outskirts of the forest, I saw some beautiful trees I could chop down but the majority of them were already felled, so I had to go a little deeper. This forest seemed more charming than the one I knew like the back of my hand – there were numerous mighty elder oak trees, and some hazel and ash trees, too. Beams of sunlight were poking through the leaves. It was still a little bit cold there, but when the sunrays touched my skin, it was like the first sip of a hot cup of tea on a freezing winter morning – I felt revitalised.

I had been walking for about an hour when I stopped and prepared to start working. I put my bundle on the sledge, took my axe and started swinging at the tree. I was full of energy and time just flew by. I had probably been working for about two hours when I got hungry. I sat on the ground, took a few slices of oat bread I had brought with me, but left one in my bundle in case I got hungry later. I was quite thirsty, too, and I was furious with myself when I realised that my flask of water had disappeared. I must have dropped it somewhere on my way there.

“No worries, surely I’ll be able to find some fresh water somewhere in the forest,” I muttered to myself.

At that point, I still had a few hours of work left, but I figured I could find some water on my way back home. So I decided to do the work as quickly as possible and then head to the warm embrace of my house. I finished cutting down the tree, chopped the wood into smaller logs, stacked everything on the sledge and got ready to head back to see my family.

As I was dragging the sledge behind me, I realised I was growing very tired. All the adrenaline from when I had been cutting down trees was gone and I was exhausted. I didn’t want to stop because I didn’t have that much time before sundown – it was already late in the afternoon and with each passing hour, the sun was going to be closer to the ground, the forest growing gloomier and darker.

I had been walking for what felt like an eternity, but I didn’t seem to be getting closer to the edge of the forest. In the morning, it had taken me an hour to get to the spot where I worked, but somehow it seemed to me that I had been wandering for more than an hour now and still hadn’t arrived anywhere. Had I perchance missed my path? I didn’t know in which direction to

go – should I continue and try to find my way out of the forest, or should I go back in the direction of the trees that I had cut?

It seemed to me that the second option would be safer, but in the end, both failed me. I couldn't figure out my way to where I had worked, nor could I find my way back home. I didn't know what to do; the situation seemed hopeless. All I knew was that I couldn't stop moving.

Another hour passed and I was still in the middle of nowhere. At that point, the sun was worryingly low on the horizon and it was getting dark. I walked under the closest tree and collapsed on the ground, helpless, hopeless.

And now I'm here, sitting on the ground, famished and parched, my tongue sticking to the roof of my mouth. I thought I could find some water somewhere, but there is none. I do have some leftover bread from before, but my mouth is so dry that I'm not able to chew the stale bread, let alone swallow it. Besides, it is freezing cold and everything is damp from the heavy fog. I'm very glad my father taught me something other than reading and writing – how to light a fire, although the fog didn't make it easy for me to do so. Not only does the fire keep me from freezing, but it also keeps away the creatures of the woods.

I'm scared. So very scared. I have been to the woods so many times I've lost count, but it was never as scary. Every now and again I can hear some branches breaking in the distance, or see a shadow moving behind the trees.

Right now, I can hear something howling and I wish it was only the cold breeze making its way through the dense branches above me. Is this it? Is this really the way I'm going to go? My favourite place in the world – the forest – and this is how it treats me? I wish I could see my family one last time to tell them how much I love them.

I have said my prayers and there is nothing more I can do.

15 October 1749

Dear Diary!

I didn't believe I could make it through the night.

I was woken up by a loud growling sound. I did not even dare open my eyes for a few moments there. I listened closely for some time and didn't flinch. Then I realised that the moving thing was behind me, so I opened my eyes. The sun must have just risen above the horizon. I sensed the creature getting closer and closer until it was only a few feet away, and I was scared for my life. Again. What would it do to me? I already imagined it tearing me to pieces with the gigantic fangs poking from its mouth.

But then something cracked in the foliage about a dozen feet to my left, and apparently the creature got distracted by the sound as it turned around immediately and ran in that direction. I turned around when the coast was clear and saw it – the prettiest little badger running away. And to think I had been so scared.

Then it came back to me, all the pain and sorrow I had felt the night before. The world darkened before my eyes.

I was still here but what good was it? I still did not know where to go and how to finally end this nightmare. I straightened my back, leaned on the nearest tree trunk and rested. My eyes began to water and before I knew it, I started crying.

But a few moments later I saw something glimmering in the distance. I was sure that it was only a mirage caused by the tears, a rude trick my body had played on me. I wiped my eyes with the back of my hand but the glimmering was still there. It was in the direction where the badger had run. I stood up, left my things under the tree and went to see what it was. The closer I got, the clearer it became. It was a source of some kind.

A thin stream of liquid was coming out from somewhere under the heap of rocks on the ground, but it did not resemble water whatsoever. The liquid was dark brown – almost black – with yellow foam forming at the top. Needless to say, it looked very poisonous.

I had no clue what to do. Right then the liquid was the only thing that could get me home, otherwise I would die of thirst. Either the poisonous-looking liquid ended me, or the thirst would.

I crouched, reached towards the liquid, formed a cup with my hands, immersed them into the liquid and took a sip. It was thick. I shut my eyes and waited for a few moments, but nothing happened. So I reluctantly opened them and looked around.

Something changed. But not in a bad way. It was a strong sense of relief. The taste was bitter, but very pleasant. My mouth was not as dry anymore. And the best part was, it hadn't killed me. I sensed strength and energy returning to my limbs and all over my body.

I took another sip, and then another one. I enjoyed the liquid despite its colour and texture. When I wasn't feeling thirsty anymore, I got up and went back to the tree where I had left my things. Everything was moving fast, and suddenly everything went blurry save for some trees. I soon realised I knew where I was – I had passed through there when I first entered the forest.

I'm writing this at my kitchen table. The first thing I did when I came back was hug my dear family, who were already very worried because I hadn't returned yesterday. I'm the happiest man on Earth right now.

The liquid was sent to me by God himself; I am sure of that. And I am forever thankful.

28 June 1755

Dear Diary!

Life has been good to me the past few years, and I forgot to note everything that has happened. But just so you know: I returned to the stream several times after my adventure. I brought some friends with me, and all of them were really impressed by my findings. We went there more and more often, and soon I built a small hut there, just so that we had a place where we could gather and talk.

One thing led to another and now, a few years later, this has become one of the most sought-after beverages in the whole of Ireland. People call it by my surname – it is quite weird hearing my own name in the pubs.

I hope to see the day when this drink, given to us by God himself, reaches the rest of the world as well.

Until next time,

Arthur Guinness



# *Dá fhada an lá tagann an tráthnóna\**

*by Ariela Herček*

Recently I've learned  
that the Irish have a word for every  
seemingly trying period of year  
we go through:  
May with its schoolwork and  
shaky weather and tiredness is  
*Lá Bealtaine*,  
a time for growth and yellow flowers.

I want to dip my hands into the bright orange of the bonfire  
and watch the cattle feast  
on the green grass,  
hearing the song of *aos sí* drawl on over  
the meadows.

And when it comes to August, I have  
always been too cowardly to admit that it's the loneliest month of all.  
All this harvest, the fruits we offer,  
all of it empty joy,  
but the Irish celebrated *Lúnasa* like it was  
a time to breathe and revel  
in what the earth had painfully produced.

Nothing ever grows anymore like it used to –  
the soil is worn-out and the cracks resemble a hollow truth.

What I like most about the Irish though,  
is that they found enough light in them  
to make even the beginning of the darker half  
of the year something worth celebrating –  
*Samhain* with its crackling wood and  
bloody knives,  
the spaces liminal in time –  
there are no ghosts and  
mythical creatures don't exist, yet

I am still trying to figure out if,  
in the darkness of my room,  
the shape in the corner is just my imagination  
running too fast for me to follow  
or if it's a spirit, here to claim the darkness.  
But the darkness persists. It resides  
in all of us and we all have our ghosts  
and our secrets and  
yes,  
they are eating at us, aren't they?

Maybe there is such a thing as magic  
and maybe the Irish were on to something  
when they acknowledged *Samhain*  
as a time to celebrate,

but I'd rather spend my years  
following the sound of laughter through the forest,  
toasting to *Lá Fhéill Bríde* and its blooming –  
a time to believe in growth and  
opportunity once again,  
to recognize a blessing when it  
knocks on your door.

It gives me hope that maybe  
the earth will be fertile once again  
and maybe we will be in love with her children  
again  
and maybe all of this new-age political drama  
is only a vessel that is leading us  
towards the holy water that will clean  
us whole.

And we will be green again.

\*Dá fhada an lá tagann an tráthnóna. = No matter how long the day, the evening comes. (No matter how bad things are, they will end.)

# *The Banshee*

*by Kaja Šafar*

On a cold mossy rock she sits,  
counting souls and bearing gifts  
of terror, grievance and salt water,  
for someone's mother, son or daughter  
will take in their last drop of life,  
one last sigh of sweet delight.

Her hair will glisten with drops of rain  
or teardrops shed in wails of pain,  
and cries will pierce the silent night  
as one more soul walks to the light.

Her ghastly sighs you cannot silence,  
cannot mistake them for songs of sirens.  
Where her shrill howls do deafen some,  
soil shall reek of death to come.

# *Rings and wings and iron*

*by Kaja Šafar*

On overgrown bridges old,  
in meadows sunlit or shadows cold,  
in nature's every nook and cranny  
mushroom rings or flower circles –  
be it two or be it many! –  
adorn the isle of emerald green.

Of all the beings lurking 'round,  
listen, listen, for the fairy sounds –  
the dancing, singing, feasting, scheming;  
beware the rules of the fairy crown.

Foiled be not, o, child of man;  
though winged and small and full of light  
these creatures take pleasure in bringing you fright.  
They'll charm you, they'll prank you,  
they'll tease you to death,  
they'll enchant and enslave you  
'till your dying breath.

So if ever your path leads you astray  
and a fairy child begs you to stay,  
swing all your iron,  
and turn out your coat,  
then run and run, and run some more  
yet never shall you be who you were before.

# “Fair Enough”

*by Conor Dunne*

The fairest of cities,  
fallen and risen,  
walking past Wilde and Molly,  
and the quays, reminiscing.

The pouring rain,  
the emerald land,  
the pints of plain,  
the “it’ll be grand”.

Just like Joyce,  
I had to leave  
the best of choices  
I could ever conceive.

Now I stroll down different roads,  
this lovely place,  
my newfound home,  
ruing the day when I must go

to the fairest of cities,  
fallen and risen,  
walking past Wilde and Molly,  
and the quays, reminiscing,  
about lovely Ljubljana  
and all that I’m missing.

\*Fair City: nickname for Dublin.

\*fallen and risen: reference to the 1916 Easter Rising

\*Wilde and Molly: reference to statues of Oscar Wilde and Molly Malone

\*Quays: they run along the North and South banks of the River Liffey. (Pronounced like “keys”)

\*Pint of plain: pint of Guinness

