

Meg Siobhain O'Connell : In search of ... Ah Beckett, what is the word?

Speeches

The Chieftains and Sinead O'Connor: 'The Foggy Dew'

*As down the glen one Easter morn
To a city fair rode I,
Their armed lines of marching men
In squadrons passed me by.
No pipe did hum, no battle drum
Did sound its loud tattoo
But the Angelus' bells o'er the Liffey swells
Rang out in the foggy dew.*

Speech One: Leader of the Belfast Brigade of the Provisional IRA

Poblacht na h Eireann¹: 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.²

Fifty-six years ago eight men wrote the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. Today I call out in the same way to my brothers and sisters. In 1916 those men sacrificed themselves in the name of Freedom. We must honour that name and realise the dreams of those men who have inspired generations of our noblest and bravest. They were the leaders of a New Ireland, one we must fight for. One we must be prepared to die for.

Fellow republicans, we are forever overshadowed by the great hand of censorship, marginalisation and denigration. Meeting in secret here today only demonstrates to me our enemies desire to isolate, demonise and destroy us. The British have oppressed us so that we cannot breathe for the hatred that fills our lungs and suffocates our pores.

For over two centuries, thousands of Irishmen and women have endured horrendous suffering. And why? For the establishment of a 32-county, sovereign independent Irish Republic. Thousands have made the ultimate sacrifice. More still have suffered long terms of imprisonment and horrific, inhuman treatment. But these

¹ Translation: People of Ireland.

² *Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, 1916.

years of hardship and oppression have only strengthened us. We are firm and fierce in our beliefs.

We cannot fail!

The 30th of January this year saw thirteen Irishmen lie dead on the streets of Derry. Our brethren murdered in our city. The Brits showed their true colours, answering rocks with bullets, aimed at seventeen-year-old kids. If those protesters were holding high the flag of Civil Rights, what does it say that they were shot down? What does it say of Mother England? It says she doesn't care for her Irish offspring. It says she doesn't give a wee damn. It says she's no mother of ours.

So we will not let our brothers die in vain. We will defend our country with strength, and if necessary, violence. This is a dirty war; there are victims but the British only respond to violence. Clench your jaw, your fists, close your heart. This is cold and this is mean but there is nothing we can do. They have dragged us to a point where we must match their malice with our own. 'Unless we learn to act like them we will never defeat them.'³

We will not fall in to the alluring trap of complacency as other leaders have done. Negotiations will never yield results. Clumsy apologies and promises have no place on the battlefield. We will not tolerate the direct rule enforced from Westminster since the 24th of March this year.

British rule in Northern Ireland is illegitimate!

We cannot lie idle. We will intensify our campaign, show no weakness and assure the passion and sincerity we hold for our cause. As the great revolutionary Patrick Pearse once wrote 'we have no desire, no ambition but the integrity, the honour, and the freedom of our native land.'⁴

The Stickies⁵ will not fight the big battles or make sacrifices, but we will. We will not disarm or be seen as impotent. If we continue to say 'I am Irish, this is my country', we cannot lose sight of our ultimate goal; the replacement of both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland states with an all-Ireland Republic. With pride in our country, our land and our God; let all Ireland stand behind the banner of the Provisional IRA!

Eire Nua! New Ireland!

Now is the time to strike. We have weaponry to support our determination. We have friends who understand our cause. We

³ Spielberg, S. *Munich*, 2005.

⁴ Pearse, P. *Why We Want Recruits*, 1915.

⁵ Colloquial term for the Official IRA .

are not alone. We are united! Now is the time to avenge all that has been executed by the British and Unionist Governments, including August of 1969, the Falls curfew of 1970, internment and the torture of detainees, and the Bloody Sunday massacre. Now is the time to stand up for those lives who have been sacrificed in the pursuit of a sovereign, independent Irish Republic and assure the flame of Freedom is being rekindled by succeeding generations with as much force as is necessary. British casualties will only serve in signifying to the English public that we are not joking. That we are unfaltering in our determination.

Tomorrow, July 21st, we will detonate twenty-two bombs.

We must ensure the continuation of daily routine is impossible. Timing is crucial. The aim of this mission is to cause widespread chaos. Those of you in charge of this segment of the plan will pack large amounts of explosives into a car driven into the Oxford Street bus station and Shopping District, our primary targets.

Of course, we will do all we can to minimise civilian casualties by phoning in warnings. It is then up to the British Army to use security forces to prevent deaths. The blood is then on their hands. Bombs are legitimate weapons to be used against an occupying force. Though we grieve the loss of lives, it must be seen as a consequence of our campaign – for this is war, and who mourns for us?

If people fall in the name of the cause we must remember 'Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations.'⁶ Draw inspiration from those who have traded their lives for ours. Gather faith from our history, from our God, and fight on!

We must demonstrate unwavering commitment and act on our beliefs. I am willing to fight for mine, to die for them. So let us show them the strength that comes from absolute devotion. We are not just violent men with guns and bombs. We are Irishmen whose life blood springs from an ancient land that refuses to surrender its sovereign independence. And who will do whatever is necessary.

Brothers, when our street corners are battlegrounds and we can't sleep in our homes for fear of the night, we are not free. If necessary we must sacrifice the present to ensure our beloved country's independent future. Do not fear death. Fear instead life without honour, without liberty. There is nothing nobler than to die like Christ on the cross of injustice so your brothers and sisters may live in resurrected glory.

⁶ On 1 August 1915, Patrick Pearse gave a graveside oration at the funeral of the Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. These words were included in the closing passage.

Draw strength from the words of Yeats:

*Out of Ireland have we come.
Great hatred, little room,
Maimed us at the start.
I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart.*⁷

Beannacht de agat. Erin go braith.⁸

The Chieftains and Sting: 'Mo Ghile Mear'

*'Se/ mo laoch, mo Ghile Mear
'Se/ mo Chaesar Gile Mear
Suan na/ se/an ni/ bhfuairesas fe/in
O/ chuaigh i gce/in mo Ghile Mear*

Translation: 'Our Hero'

*He is my hero, my Gallant Darling,
He is my Caesar, a Gallant Darling;
I've found neither rest nor fortune
Since my Gallant Darling went far away.*

Speech Two: Representative of the Omagh community

A cháirde⁹.

I look around me and see forty thousand faces gathered here. But it is no joy that draws us. This Saturday morning here in Omagh we grieve the loss of innocent lives. I look above me and the sky can barely hold its tears. But grey clouds are not new to us. We have suffered dark, deadly days in the past; become accustomed to our families and our country being torn apart by hatred. But just one week ago a bombing – the most devastating of any single event since the beginning of the troubles – claimed the lives of twenty eight of our townsfolk – my son, your husband, his mother.

Good Friday this year an agreement was signed that promised to stop the fighting. The word peace was heard again and Ireland breathed a sigh of relief. However, there were those who saw The Belfast Agreement as a betrayal of the All-Ireland cause and sought to take matters into their own hands. These so called

⁷ Yeats, W. B. *Remorse for Intemperate Speech*. 1933

⁸ Translation: God be with you. Ireland forever.

⁹ Translation: My friends.

Freedom Fighters are false profits, sacrificing the life-blood of their own people, and their legacy is carnage.

Each and every one of you has heard the horrific stories of the war zone that lay on these streets on the 15th of August, so I'll not haunt you further. But I will ask, as I'm sure you've done, why would anyone create such murder and mayhem? In the name of God, how could anyone do that to innocent people? Because these men and woman are terrorists, addicted to violence and the sound of war cries. Do they declare war on Omagh? On mothers and children shopping in town? Have they stooped so low that this is who they are fighting now? What chance have any of us got against these murderers when their target turns from a building to ordinary people.

Well I say to them: you failed. You've achieved nothing, and have achieved nothing for 30 years, except to torture the people you claim to be uniting. Once again, fanaticism clouded all reason and a petition for freedom reads as a body count. There is no united Ireland with terrorists in our midst, intent on leaving a path of violence and destruction as the Hallmark for Freedom Fighters. They ripped the heart from Omagh in an ambush that is unforgivable and deserve no cause justified to them. We will not allow a minority of murderers to stop a peace process that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want. We have torn off our labels, Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist, Unionist. For what good did they do us, when we couldn't sleep in our homes for fear of the night?

Today vigils take place in Dublin, Dundalk and every provincial town in Northern Ireland. Here with us in our sorrow stands SDLP¹⁰ leader John Hume, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams, Irish President Mary McAleese and United Kingdom Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. If such an appalling act of savagery can unite us all in grief, surely we could be united in harmony?

So today while we mourn our dear departed, we stand alongside each other in the pursuit of freedom. To live our lives liberated from terror. We will play no part in age old wars, quarrels that live and breathe while their victims lie in graves are not the answers we seek. I will not ask for more blood to be spilled in their honour. That will not bring them back, nor would it ease the suffering. I must hold on to that which murderers surrender, that which is most important to us all – my humanity. And so I trade a cry for revenge for one of peace. Braver men than me have trod the bloody path demanding a life for a life. But I would urge the path set down by the bravest of all; our Lord, Jesus Christ, 'Blessed are

¹⁰ Social Democratic Labor Party

the peacemakers'.¹¹ We must follow his path, one that offers peace and respect. We must realise that freedom from that which we hate cannot come at the price of turning us into that which we despise. The ends do not justify the means.

Today we pray for the future, for our children. Patrick Kavanagh said it far better than I:

*Child there is light somewhere
Under a star,
Sometime it will be for you.*¹²

At this exact time one week ago, the heart was ripped from Omagh. Now, I would ask you all to share with me some moments of silence, and make a sacred promise to all those who have lost their lives so unjustly, that this *madness* will end.

¹¹ Gospel of Mathew 5.9

¹² Kavanagh, P. *To A Child*.

The Cranberries: 'Zombie'

*Another head hangs lowly,
Child is slowly taken.
And the violence caused such silence,
Who are we mistaken?*

*But you see, it's not me, it's not my family.
In your head, in your head they are fighting,
With their tanks and their bombs,
And their bombs and their guns.
In your head, in your head, they are crying ...*

Speech Three: A fictional contemporary poet

Fáilte.¹³

A sailor is drawn home from the sea by the cry of a word carried across the waves: Abhaile. A word so imbedded with meaning it weeps with joy and contentment, roars in anger and pain. He has come to sit alongside the poets, singers and playwrights of many generations – to celebrate Cork as the Capital of European Culture as he never thought possible. All titles are forfeited as they gather to share the wonder of words. Detailing their pain in a standard refrain, reciting sadness in rhyming couplets and shedding tears for Ireland. Yet they must also, with imagery sublime, revel in its beauty and magic – for eventually it is this that draws the weary traveller home.

There was a time when I thought I would not return. For me, this place only held memories of blockades in the streets and cries in the night. I lost many friends to the Troubles. To the torrent of grief that seemed to flow through those times, hiding in factories nine hours a day or in the bottom of pints at night. Great pain dwelled here, seeping in to the cracks of town houses. Emerald hills sunk from despondency and the weight of what felt like decades of rain folding into puddles. Grey walls melted into grey skies and I could never quite make out the blue that I knew hid behind the fog. There is an intensity and persistence to the suffering of Irish people that I believed was matched by no others. As a citizen of the world, I now know better.

I paraphrased Joyce when once my words claimed that this land was cursed with the anger of Jove and I would not participate in its suffering. I chose to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely and as wholly as I could, using for my defence the only arms I allowed, exile and the language of rationalisation.¹⁴ I saw

¹³ Translation: Welcome.

¹⁴ Joyce, J. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

no way out of the troubles, as Sean O'Casey wrote, I could sense nothing 'but the stink of battle-wounds and blood'. It rained out of the heavens but it felt like ash and all I could smell was the smoke and burning tyres of my life. And so, like so many others, I went to England to disguise my lilt with a cockney drawl. And achieved this with great success. I could hide my heritage.

And yet I felt the mournful cry of the Bodhrán, a cotton-candy flute, Guinness curling around rolling tongues and the pull of the land. I began to come to terms with the death of the past, to see things in the light of the future, to imagine a return – where memories had grown independent of my presence; spawned and blossomed, unfamiliar to me. As I flew over the sea of greens that is the Irish countryside I knew I was coming home. Home to a heritage I only recognised in separation. Poetry, stories, myths and music – heard in schools, pubs and playhouses across the world. If the creations of a writer 'are little more than the moods and passions of his own heart, given names, and sent to walk the earth' then mine wandered blindly to Donegal, Londonderry and Antrim. My pen began to weave its way back to my boyish youth, and I knew I had to follow – to celebrate the land I had long forgotten. To find a new language where words shine with reconciliation and appreciation.

Yeats warned us that 'words are always getting conventionalised to some secondary meaning. It is one of the works of poetry to take the truants in custody and bring them back to their right senses.' Because language is not a mirror but a lamp, one which must not dim in times when words are used to diminish and dehumanise, to advance purposes of which we are often kept ignorant. If words are all we have, they must illuminate rather than cast a dark shadow.

For some have used words to praise the courage of those who have killed and died for freedom. While others have used their language to mourn the loss of innocent souls and damn their murderers. But is this not the same coin? And do we not lose whichever side lands face up on the barren ground?

The poetry in this collection is for Ireland, I've brought my words home as promised. May I now share an extract from a poem in my anthology; stirred to life by the last published work of Samuel Beckett.

Words:

– that are crimson, rise in anger,
blaze and burn the cities, curdling
the blood, of those they drown

– that are black, destroy with deceit,

manipulate and mislead, concealing
with darkness, the way forward

– that are silver, deliver hope,
glow and sanctify, uniting
all in their steady embrace.

I have gone in search and am still searching ... but Ah! Beckett,
what is the word? That golden word that in its wisdom sets us
free. That lies in the green hills and the rising sun, gives breath to
ink and makes words soar.

For we are a nation of poets:

*The poems flow from hand unbidden,
and the hidden source is the watchful heart.
The sun rises in spite of everything
and the far cities are beautiful and bright.*¹⁵

And if we share our words here in this cradle of culture, then
perhaps someday we may find a way to share our world.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir. Slan abhaile.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mahon, D. *Everything is Going to Be Alright*.

¹⁶ Translation: That's all for today. Thank you all very much. Safe home.

Mary Black: 'Song for Ireland'

*Walking all the day, near tall towers where falcons build
their nests*

*Silver winged they fly, they know the call of freedom in
their breasts*

*Soar Black Head against the sky, between the rocks that
run down to the sea*

*Living on your western shore, saw summer sunsets,
asked for more*

I stood by your Atlantic sea, and sang a song for Ireland

*Dreaming in the night, I saw a land where no man had to
fight*

*Waking in your dawn, I saw you crying in the morning
light*

*Lying where the Falcons fly, they twist and turn all in you
e'er blue sky*

*Living on your western shore, saw summer sunsets asked
for more*

*I stood by your Atlantic sea, and I sang a song for
Ireland.*