



Spin Cycle

Days are close, winter winds are hardened in Rostrevor;
 I shiver by the kettle, wearing 'happynewyear' like a coat,
 And today's *Irish Times* is better for the grate than the mind;
 You need a good broadsheet to build a proper fire.
 The old binned year, and all that made it loved, is the past,
 now for the birds that fly so small and brave against the sky
 and their song, much like our own, will never come and last.
 Despite the grasps of loving intentions, the world comes turning faster and fast.
 Radiowaves come crashing down the walls and break the day in two,
 as the electioneering comes in and wins our programming day-to-day,
 birdsong and kettle chorus become mere supporting acts to
 the litany of latchycos, from whose screeching, the BBC shockjockey is bought his daily stew.
 Well-fed are such fattened mouths, but the listeners are given no nourishing repast
 by the muttering minds of meagre men, amplified beyond all reason,
 highly-sugared processed muck that even the tin couldn't stomach.
 And, holy God, I come to think free speech should be far more expensive,
 as day on day the 'whataboutwhatyoudid' lot are renewed yet another season.
 And one says 'remember Derry,'
 And the other says Belfast,
 And one says Kingsmills,
 And one says Whitecross,
 And one says Jean McConville,
 And one says Joan Connolly,
 And one says Willie Frazer,
 And one says Annie Maguire.
 Listen. Would you listen? Would you ever listen ... it's me that's speaking now.
 Too many living hours lost as each page of *Lost Lives* is ripped out and turned another
 battlefield: new waves of rudderless zhilaohu have come riding to a paper Vinegar Hill. No.
 We ought to know the names of our victims, as well as our victims.
 And as we bring comfort to our martyrs, let all us hold dear our victims too.
 And it's no life, living on the turn of this ever-spinning circle of sadness and pain,
 And we'd all be better off going for a drink, before we're driven to it,
 And let's learn those people's names, as well as places, and not take those names in vain,
 And wise up, find refuge in some well-worn bar, a happy glass, and a dog-eared song.
 Cruciatus the shockjock! Give me a ballad with a lousy half-a-touch of wit.
 And so I deck the 'fuck-off' button on the radiowaves for some breath of a Christloving break
 And walk down to the shore to clear the head on this day- coiled in the thick of greycast throng-
 And I stand by myself, with Gullion in the distance and the wee Guillemots in the fore.
 That Big Border, that makes the headline writers gasp, appears a softer thing in these old
 hushing waves,
 than on those crackling, cackling, shackling waves I heard before-
 Sixtyfive millennia have rolledrolled onon since
 liquid fire heat pushed the world up on its shoulders
 creating hills round turning tides and spitting granite boulders

millions on millions on millions of missed calendar marks
 made Gullion's sidewayswindywater green and purple park
 Cailleach Beara comes as sure as mountains sweep
 to say hullo to the sea and colour fades from every leaf
 suddener but in the shadowing seconds of a sleepy Sunday
 someone – a Rodgers maybe – first wrote down
 'Armagh.'

Firstthing Monday morning, came the cry,

'oh aye- right ye are!

... but *whatabout* yer ma?!

Inspecting a map carved into agelong storied mountains with a dagger sharp as tongues,
 And we've all a verse written for every second of the last two centuries.

Before comes little ages, ye'll be whiskey morning sandpaper thirsting for a break,
 but those rallying cries that nail the cross to the pyre, are farflung from the pub song.

'FROM CARRICKMACROSS TO CROSSMAGLEN
 THERE WERE MORE ROGUES THAN HONEST MEN.'

pulpitshouted, hair and quare, marching through city, town, and bog,

by big Paisley pander-pondering to personal political prospects,

riling up the Little House tenants, whose blood would come to stain his gloves.

Now Ian Óg eats from the same backhand brownpaper bog,
 while Stephen Farry, let him tarry, sits behind in the Commons sucking sultry sugar stick.

Down in De Barra, Mickey McConnell gives a soupçon of sense,

Of full 'n' frank discussions – let me be clear –

Negotiated compromise, checking legal viabilities,

Annunciation, ambiguity, but state facts as they are,

Fundamental principles, and doctrinaire philosophy.

And Nudey Wilson's got a new gig, MC Tuesday nights at the Empyre,

funny as a chipfat fire that melts away your face,

is it any wonder them Barbadian fellas – stag do, I think –

And sure they went without their drink!

Meanwhile, Al Johnson jives along, barefaced, in Cricklewood to the Galtimore

and we await with crossing fingers to see him scorched by the judges.

In Crawford's Bar, Tommy Sands sings of roses, and

songs that walked together hand-in-hand, of

fish that dance upon the Clanrye and

stick up a fin to hail a bubble, Laganbound

Arlene's speaking to an empty camera, and there's not a viewer to be seen,

the film too, has gone off to the pictures, and as she nurses the keening dregs of a career,

well she knows crocodiles will bite the hand that feeds

when they've been begging for a crumb.

And why do we like being Irish? Sure ye know yourself. You know yourself.

It's in the stories and the songs, and we know,

well we know, the songs never last all that long.

The stories blessed in holy water from beside a faerie tree,

and all and each, each to each, meeting by the shoulder, wash them down

with a pint of stout and a glass of whiskey

in rooms small enough to be parlourish as

each and all packed in, and, well and true, get pishkey.

Music rises as heat from the reeds of the red hot violin,

and this scene plays out at every tidal fold

along the heartstrung tide where the Shannon feeds into the Kilbourne

and the faithful for wanting of a faith come to drink away their ever loving sins.

You can try to think it over, should you like to think things through, over and over,
 but the heart of this feeling is a thing we feel
 and lives alongside that we which feel but can't bear ourselves to think.

Never long til 'fuck off' time is called by the wearied face at the bar,
 And the lights climb back up the ceiling and we walk, chip-in-hand,
 with one eye on the bedside and one eye on a headwards star.

And, as well we know, too well we know,

lonesome like the whippoorwill perched on a longtime dying fig tree,
 the boat that leaves from Belfast harbour. Four hours in a tinboat; time floating still:

Away you go and curl up at the bar, reciting Ferguson, Mangan, Yeats, Davis,
 as time ticks away your armour you may even succumb to fecking *Ireland's Call*.

It's an Irishmess, this Irishness.

The candles of the Irish poor were originally lit in cottage windows
 to light the way back home, of those who were cast astray.

Hook, Crook, Dungarvan or the Galtimore, ersatz home made from home way away;
 eventually, eventually, albeit not always the eventually for which we all long.

Nevermind why we like it, but can we first define what it is?

Kathleen Ni Houlihan, and a country as a woman –

Did these poor bastards write under the delusion that Donard and Gullion were a buxom pair of
 tits?

That's not it: a country is not a her, a country is an it.

And while we're on that auld subject, let me say to weathermen and other weary willies who see
 electoral boundaries carved between the ancient trees,

State and country are two separate, sometimes joined, entities
 And two salmon swim the same, though they may swim two different seas.

Then again, again I say, a nation is much bigger than a country, and much longer than a state,
 for there are songs that travel as people are carried far beyond mountain, bog, and gantries,
 and this all happens in those themed pubs where the pilgrims and the stragglers stay so late.

All those longgone generations, exiled by the tyranny of the pound,

– IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN, made breathing thevshis for the want of a quid –
 packed their lives into a boat or plane,

and in their bag a salt-stained sod of the old home ground.

Ireland is not set in granite or volcanic stone, but written in a well-worn song.

Our Land has been twisted by hand-wringing bloodhounds

Merchants at the temple tables, sickly singing from the pulpit

That the workers toil for the sake of toil, told that's the work of their fate

By the ones who claim God in their eye, but the Devil's playing the harp.

God, whichever you prefer, is for the wall above your own kitchen table,

'Our demands, most modest are, we want only the world.'

Only the world, to hold, as our world is all we hold, to run and laugh

And skip and sing through as in those stories long since told

And let us tell our stories now, and listen now, for soon the world will too soon be turned.

Blessed is the name, that keeps ringing like a last orders bell,

Not to cast you into the wraparound cold winds, this time,

But to call you home again, when you've nothing left to sell

Beattie beats a gentler Bodhrán batter, but

his soft percussion is drowned by the hived eructations of the larger Lambeg drum.

Home at last, auld L. Malone pours you a glass of

Redbreast from some dive in Temple bar,

and he sings a verse of The Crather, with one eye

on the distant door that stands ajar

The flag that flies above is a far more distant thing
 Than the people who walk below, the land their feet come home to,
 and those inherited songs brought easy as air to their lips, and which they sing.
 Even the Butcher's Apron is not such a brutal thing as the landlord's silken doily,
 There's more to be said for walking the wild braving fields,
 Than living in our pretty little sectarian windowboxes, and our ersatz reality.
 Before we're long into the bar it'll reach its closing time, and
 Lights will climb back up the ceiling. We'll walk home, our own way home,
 And we'll look to sketch a line of song that makes 'life' and 'longing' rhyme.
 Eastwood's wearing John Hume's glasses, but he doesn't have the sight
 While the wee, Ógra, Shinnars sit all pretty in cosy, fire-roaring pub snugs
 and sing songs of a muddy Soloheadbeg fight-
 Out of joint as much as out of key.
 The past is a fairy tale, the future is *Wbo*. The world is just one day
 rolling on and on again on and on while wee temporal pilgrims, no
 Temple to call a home, tie a Bratóg Bríd to a dying branch
 in the hope for hoping hope
 – little candle, big window –
 We might all come home. Our world is just a little town,
 on a big ancient rock, and despite the very best of love and loving
 Come that Sunday sidewalk morning, we're all going down.
 Now no more chopper blades a-beating,
 I can hear a little bird sing from the wireless,
 and come to think, despite myself –
 at least Robin Swann, brown-eyed fella, is
 a safe pair of hands. Yes, so he is, yes
 Now it's sixty five minutes from the tide
 came in, and I'm a little further
 up Rostrevor shore. Calm water, still
 my eye on Gullion in the distance and
 the wee Guillemots in the fore.

Fionnbharr Rodgers has written articles for *Northern Slant*, *Backbench*, and *Slugger O'Toole*. He has had poetry published in *A New Ulster*.

