

Writing Ireland

Lecture 6: Ballads and Songs

Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738)

(cf. Lecture 3: M'Cabe's/Charlotte Brooke's "Elegy on the Death of Carolan" 1738/89)

- compositions for harp, e.g.

"Carolan's Draught"

"Charles O'Connor"

as played on the acoustic guitar by Arty McGlynn
(*McGlynn's Fancy*, 1979)

"The Hills Above Drumquin"

(by Felix Kearney, folk poet, Arty McGlynn's grandfather)
Performed by David Hammond, voc, Arty McGlynn, g

God bless the hills of Donegal. I've heard their praises sung
In days long gone beyond recall, when I was very young;
I oft times pray to see the day before life's course is run
That I should sing the praises of the hills above Drumquin.

God bless the hills of Dooish, be they heather-clad or lea,
The wooded glens of Coel, and the fort at Dunaree,
The green-clad slopes of Kirlish as they meet the setting sun,
Descending in their glory to the hills above Drumquin.

The whins around Drumbarley make the hills a yellow blaze,
When the heather turns to purple on my native Dressaugh braes,
The limestone rocks of Clamore are glistening in the sun,
When nature's at it's grandest on the hills above Drumquin.

I've roamed the Scottish Highlands with their beauty rare and grand;
I've rambled through the Lowlands; it's a cold and heartless land,
I'll never be down-hearted when each day's work is done;
My mind goes back at sunset to the hills above Drumquin.

Drumquin, you're not a city, but you're all the world to me;
Your lot I ne'er will pity though you never greater be,
I love you as I know you, when from school I used to run,
On the homeward journey through you to the hills above Drumquin.

This life is sad and dreary, and the task of it is sore,
My feet are growing weary, I may never wander more;
So lay me down in Langfield, when the course of life is run,
On the sheltered side of Dooish, 'neath the hills above Drumquin.

Thomas Moore (1779-1852)

- studied law, but found fame as a poet, translator, balladeer and singer
- comic operas *The Gypsy King* (with Michael Kelly, 1801) and *M.P.* (with Samuel Arnold, 1811)
- *Irish Melodies* (1807-34)
- *National Airs* (1818)

https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/gipsy_prince

“Oh! breathe not his name” (1807)

Oh, breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,
Where cold and unhonor'd, his relics are laid:
Sad, silent and dark be the tears that we shed,
As night-dew that falls on the grass o'er his head.

But the night-dew that falls, though in silence it weeps,
Shall brighten with verdure the grave where he sleeps;
And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,
Shall long keep his memory green in our souls.

“She is far from the land” (1812)

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers are round her, sighing;
But coldly she turns from their gaze, and weeps,
For her heart in his grave is lying.

She sings the wild songs of her dear native plains,
Every note which she lov'd awakening -
Ah! little they think who delight in her strains,
How the heart of the Minstrel is breaking.

He had lived for his love, for his country he died,
They were all that to life had entwin'd him -
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,
Nor long will his love stay behind him.

Oh! make her a grave where the sunbeams rest,
When they promise a glorious morrow;
They'll shine o'er her sleep like a smile from the West,
From her own lov'd island of sorrow.

“Dear Harp of my Country” (1815)

Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long;
When proudly, my own Island Harp! I unbound thee,
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song!

The warm lay of love and the light note of gladness
Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill;
But so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness,
That e'en in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.

Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers,
This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine!
Go, sleep with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers,
Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine.

If the pulse of the patriot, soldier, or lover,
Have throbb'd at our lay, 'tis thy glory alone;
I was *but* as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
And all the wild sweetness I wak'd was thy own!

“The harp that once through Tara’s halls” (1807)

The harp that once through Tara’s halls
The soul of music shed,
Now hangs as mute on Tara’s walls
As if that soul were fled.
So sleeps the pride of former days,
So glory’s thrill is o’er,
And hearts that once beat high for praise,
Now feel that pulse no more!

No more to chiefs and ladies bright
The harp of Tara swells;
The chord alone that breaks at night,
Its tale of ruin tells.
Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes,
The only throb she gives,
Is when some heart indignant breaks,
To show that still she lives.

“Oft, in the stilly night” (1818)

Oft, in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber’s chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood’s years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm’d and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber’s chain hath bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

When I remember all
The friends, so link’d together,
I’ve seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one,
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere Slumber’s chain hath bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

POPULAR SONGS AND BALLADS

(as collected, for example, in
Padraic Colum, *Anthology of Irish Verse*, 1922:
181 poems arranged along national themes
Part 1: The House, the Road, the Field, the Fair and the Fireside
Part 2: Street Songs and Countryside Songs, Mainly Anonymous
Part 3: The Celtic World and the Realm of Faery
Part 4: Poems of Place and Poems of Exile
Part 5: Satires and Laments
Part 6: Our Heritage)

“The Shan Van Vocht” (1790s, printed in *The Nation*, 1842)

[i.e. “The Poor Old Woman,” a “secret” name for Ireland, like “Roisin Dubh” (the little Dark Rose) and Kathleen ni Houlahan (Kathleen the daughter of Houlahan). These “secret” names were adopted to avoid charges of sedition, and to construct and claim an indigenous tradition]

Oh! the French are on the sea,
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
The French are on the sea,
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
Oh! the French are in the Bay,
They’ll be here without delay,
And the Orange will decay,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

Chorus:

Oh! the French are in the Bay,
They’ll be here by break of day
And the Orange will decay,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

And where will they have their camp?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
Where will they have their camp?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
On the Curragh of Kildare,
The boys they will be there,
With their pikes in good repair,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.
v
To the Curragh of Kildare
The boys they will repair
And Lord Edward will be there,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

Then what will the yeomen do?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
What should the yeomen do,
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
What should the yeomen do,
But throw off the red and blue,
And swear that they'll be true
To the Shan Van Vocht?
v

What should the yeomen do,
But throw off the red and blue,
And swear that they'll be true
To the Shan Van Vocht?

And what colour will they wear?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
What colour will they wear?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
What colours should be seen
Where their father's homes have been
But their own immortal green?
Says the Shan Van Vocht. [...]

And will Ireland then be free?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
Will Ireland then be free?
Says the Shan Van Vocht;
Yes! Ireland shall be free,
From the centre to the sea;
Then hurrah for Liberty!
Says the Shan Van Vocht. [...]

“The Wearin’ o’the Green” (c. 1798)

OH, Paddy dear! and did ye hear the news that's goin' round?
The shamrock is forbid by law to grow on Irish ground!
No more St. Patrick's day we'll keep; his colour can't be seen,
For there's a cruel law ag'in' the Wearin' o' the Green!

I met with Napper Tandy, and he took me by the hand,
And he said, “How's poor ould Ireland, and how does she stand?”
“She's the most distressful country that ever yet was seen,
For they're hanging men and women there for the Wearin' o' the Green.”

An' if the colour we must wear is England's cruel red,
Let it remind us of the blood that Ireland has shed;
Then pull the shamrock from your hat, and throw it on the sod,
An' never fear, 'twill take root there, though under foot 'tis trod.

When law can stop the blades of grass from growin' as they grow,
An' when the leaves in summer time their colour dare not show,
Then I will change the colour, too, I wear in my caubeen;
But till that day, please God, I'll stick to the Wearin' o' the Green.

“The Rising of the Moon” (1866)

“Oh, then tell me, Shawn O’Farrall,
Tell me why you hurry so?”
“Hush, ma bouchal, hush and listen;”
And his cheeks were all a-glow:
“I bear orders from the Captain—
Get you ready quick and soon;
For the pikes must be together
At the Rising of the Moon.”

“Oh, then tell me, Shawn O’Farrall,
Where the gathering is to be?”
“In the oul’ spot by the river
Right well known to you and me;
One word more—for signal token
Whistle up the marching tune,
With your pike upon your shoulder,
At the Rising of the Moon.”

Out from many a mud-wall cabin
Eyes were watching through the night:
Many a manly chest was throbbing
For the blessed warning light;
Murmurs passed along the valley
Like the Banshee’s lonely croon,
And a thousand blades were flashing
At the Rising of the Moon.

There, beside the singing river,
That dark mass of men were seen—
Far above the shining weapons
Hung their own beloved green.
“Death to every foe and traitor!
Forward! strike the marching tune,
And hurrah, my boys, for freedom!
'Tis the Rising of the Moon.”

Well they fought for poor Old Ireland,
And full bitter was their fate;
(Oh! what glorious pride and sorrow
Fill the name of Ninety-Eight!)
Yet, thank God, e’en still are beating
Hearts in manhood’s burning noon,
Who would follow in their footsteps
At the Rising of the Moon.

Padraic Colum, “She Moved Through the Fair” (1916)

My young love said to me, ‘My brothers won’t mind
And my father won’t slight you for your lack of kind.’
And she laid her hand on me, and this she did say:
It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.

She stepped away from me and she moved through the fair
And fondly I watched her go here and go there,
Then she went her way homeward with one star awake,
As the swan in the evening moves over the lake.

The people were saying no two were e’er wed
But one had a sorrow that never was said,
And I smiled as she passed with her goods and her gear,
And that was the last that I saw of my dear.

I dreamt it last night that my young love came in,
So softly she came, her feet made no din;
She came close beside me and this she did say:
‘It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.’

“Sunday Bloody Sunday” (U2, *War*, 1983)

I can’t believe the news today,
I can’t close my eyes and make it go away.
How long, how long must we sing this song?
How long? Tonight we can be as one.

Broken bottles under children’s feet,
Bodies strewn across a dead end street,
But I won’t heed the battle call,
It puts my back up, puts my back up against the wall.

Sunday, bloody Sunday.
Sunday, bloody Sunday.

And the battle’s just begun,
There’s many lost, but tell me who has won?
The trenches dug within our hearts,
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart.

Sunday, bloody Sunday.
Sunday, bloody Sunday.

How long, how long must we sing this song?
How long,

Tonight we can be as one.
Tonight, tonight.

Sunday, bloody Sunday.

Wipe the tears from your eyes,
Wipe your tears away,
Wipe your blood shot eyes.

Sunday, bloody Sunday.

And it's true we are immune.
When fact is fiction and T.V. is reality,
And today the millions cry,
We eat and drink while tomorrow they die.
The real battle just begun.
To claim the victory Jesus won,
On a Sunday bloody Sunday,
Sunday bloody Sunday.

John Faulkner, "Bloody Sunday" (*Folk Friends 2*, 1980)

We demand civil rights the marchers did say
5000 people assembled that day
To Free Derry Corner set out with a cheer
And the march it was peaceful there was nothing to fear

But the paratroup regiment came down the street
500 men all over six feet
They carried machine guns and big SLRs
Comin' down Williams Street in their sarrasin [?]cars

The orders were given in Whitehall we know
Open fire, kill a few, draw 'em out, have a go
No fire was returned as the world knows today
13 innocent men with their lives had to pay

At Free Derry Corner the firing began
Some people fell and some people ran
Their civil rights banners were stained bloody red
At the barricades there they shot three people dead

The wounded lie bleeding a doctor is called
The firing continues and another to fall
The harvest they reaped with their bullets of lead
Bloody Sunday in Derry and thirteen men dead

Their tribunal mockery was soon carried out
Just doing their duty of that there's no doubt
On England's proud history a crime added yet
How can we forgive it how can we forget

**“What Makes the Irish Heart Beat”
(Van Morrison, *Down the Road*, 2002)**

All that trouble all that grief
That's why I had to leave
Staying away too long is in defeat
Why I'm singing this song
Why I'm heading back home
That's what makes the Irish heart beat

I'm just like a hobo riding a train
I'm like a gangster living in Spain
Have to watch my back and I'm running out of time
When I roll the dice again
If lady luck will call my name
That's what makes the Irish heart beat

Well that's what makes it beat
When I'm standing on the street
And I'm standing underneath this Wrigley's sign
Oh so far away from home
But I know I've got to roam
That's what makes the Irish heart beat

And it was off to foreign climes
On the Piccadilly line
We were standing underneath the Wrigley's sign
So far away from home
Well I know I've got to roam
That's what makes the Irish heart beat

Just like a sailor out on the foam
Any port in a storm
Where we tend to burn the candle at both ends
Down the corridors of fame
Like the spark ignites the flame
That's what makes the Irish heart beat

But I roll the dice again
If lady luck will call my name
That's what makes the Irish heart beat
Oh, that's what makes the Irish heart beat

**“Oliver Boy (All Of Our Boys)”
(Flogging Molly, *Speed of Darkness*, 2011)**

Oh! Oliver Boy what did you do?
But crush the hand you never shook
Then rob the rights of people to be free
Oh! Oliver Boy it's a terrible state
You left behind a worse off race
Where dignity and pride fought for their place
Oh! Oliver Boy now you are gone
And we're still here where we belong
Forgiveness being our strength you'll never see

Now the sun shines on this page I write
Though it's raining hard in Palestine
No lands are promised lands
When will we see?
So don't tell me that your God's my God
I don't think they even care at all
Just a pantomime behind a curtain lies deceit
Oh listen to me bark out loud
Without a voice and little growl
Snapping at the heels I wait
For something more to change
The more they stay the same

[Chorus:]

Oliver Boy! It's the same militia
Oliver Boy! Just the clothes are different
Oliver Boy! It's the same old story
Where there's blood there's death not glory

Look into these empty eyes
Fed upon by parasites
As beauty's ugly head devours its plight
While the borders of our hate create
Nothing more than each our fate
Trapped between our comfort and our crime
So stand along the graveyard wall
And watch the souls perform their song
Sing to us the dead above
As the mourners come to pray
The living stay away

[Chorus:]

Oliver Boy! It's the same militia
Oliver Boy! Just the clothes are different
Oliver Boy! It's the same old story
Where there's blood there's death not glory

Oliver Boy! We're all someone's sons
All of our Boys! Just put down the guns
Oliver Boy! You're dead but listen
You were wrong but we're no different

Marching to the left, everyone in step
Don't ask the question, why we're here with no direction
Marching to the right, this is not our fight
The curse of friction, born of man and contradiction

[Chorus]

All of our Boys!

Now the sun shines on this page I write
Though it's raining hard in Palestine

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