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❖ For Polly, Harry, Lydia, and Ellen Adair

INTRODUCTION

DEVENISH ISLAND, LOWER LOUGH ERNE,
COUNTY FERMANAGH
Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, *Ireland*, 1850

AT THE END OF A SHORT WINTER'S DAY

Night falls, winds rise. The door is shut, the curtain drawn. A lamp sputters, shooting shadows up the wall, and the houses of the hills close in upon themselves, abandoning the world to darkness. Pure darkness welcomes the winds that skim off the ocean, roll over the mountains, and fall upon the hills to pound the home. Roof timbers groan and hold. The winds crash among the trees.

Low clouds cover the moon, and the road before me runs swiftly into emptiness. Beyond the black hedges there are houses I know, but they send no warming sign of habitation, no hum, no glow. Only the feel of the road, hard beneath my feet, and the quick repetition of steps assure me that I am moving correctly. The road turns under me, and I comply, it turns again familiarly and, pressed eastward by the wind, I walk, nearly run, until a pale rectangle forms by the roadside. I feel into the darkness for the latch, turn once more, and am greeted with my name as I gain my seat by the hearth. "A bad night," my host says, turning his face back into the small fire at our feet. I agree. "The worst," he says.

Night holds the corners and rises to the roof. A candle in a brass stick shapes a small circle of faint light on the table beside us. The fire low in the throat of the chimney touches with pink the faces of the men packed around it. There is Young Tom, with the collar of his coat turned up to shelter his ears, hunched beside me. Johnny huddles across the fire from the old man who makes his home in these two cold rooms. Johnny has come tonight, as Tom and I have come, walking the black lanes because winter nights are long and the man of this house, Hugh Nolan, is brilliant.

When Hugh Nolan was a child, this house, built by his grandfather's hands, was known as a ceili (kay-lee) house, a place for the neighbors to gather, and now they gather still, knowing that others will also seek a place at his hearth in hopes that his wit will help them pass the night safely. They call him eccentric, a bent old man in a long black coat who lives alone with his cats in his smoke-dark house, and they call him a saint. They have watched him pedal his bike to Mass, they speak of his plain blameless way and do not know that he sends the little money he gets to support a convent

in England. They name him "historian." His memory is vast, the past is impeccably ordered within it, and he settles disputes among his neighbors over boundaries and rights of way across fields. His pleasure in youth, he says, came from listening to the old people talking, and his delight in old age, he says, is keeping the truth and telling the whole tale. In this small community, built upon damp hills in the North of Ireland, Hugh Nolan is the oldest man. He was born in 1896. For sixty-five years he served the earth, and now he works for the people who come to ceili with him. They call him a "star." He is the man who can reach into a dreary conversation, find a thread of silver, and spin it into a yarn that deadens time and enlivens the senses.

The body is beaten with work. The soul is numb. The company is the same. They have given all they have on nights long in the past. There is no worthwhile news, so Johnny tries again, repeating Hugh Nolan's words. The night is a bad one. Aye, the worst. We are in agreement. "Well, we have to take what comes," Johnny says. "We can't change it." Wearily Mr. Nolan replies, "Oh, aye." There is the trouble. They know each other too well. Three decades separate Tom and Johnny, and nearly three more separate Johnny and Hugh, but their experience has been too similar. They cut turf in the spring, dig spuds in the fall. They have followed the cows into the sloughs and gotten drunk together in the town. Conversations too quickly find the old ruts and sail too swiftly to first principles so perfectly framed in words that there is no knowing whether they erupt from the depths or ride on the surface. So the ceiliers come and they sit and they wait, crying inwardly for someone gifted with wit to build a story in the place that lies between inescapable daily realities and inescapable philosophical propositions.

Young Tom takes out a pack of cigarettes and offers them around. Johnny reaches out to light us. Mr. Nolan cracks a match and sucks its flame into the remains at the bottom of his pipe. Smoking together, we watch the fire. A turf fire does not flare and snap. It smolders, rolling into itself, providing a spectacle that is only about as engaging as a television set. For a while the mind follows the eye through the transformations of color into the red-gold heart of the fire, discovering tiny flecks of blue and green and curls of rosy smoke that rise past black iron pothooks and crooks into the soot-choked gullet of the chimney. The mind needs more, and it wanders, and when it wanders here, among farmers poor in the things of the world, they worry because, they say, if you think you will become sad, for life is short and death is long, and if sadness grips you it will drag you toward despair, a state in which you are of no use to your neighbor or yourself, in which you forget God's special love for you. In silent contemplation, in brooding, you drop toward damnation. You must, at all costs, avoid thinking. Your hard life has already taught you the truths philosophers seek, so you rise and go upon the roads, no matter the cold and the dark, and you gather someplace where others will help you keep your mind off the pains in your joints and the damned old cows and the muck and the winds and the rains and the terrors that visit in silence, someplace where you can help others remain alive to life. We watch the fire and we are not silent. It is just that the topics we try, the usual topics of the health of the neighbors and the prices of cattle and the bombs in the towns, all fail. None is collectively lifted toward entertainment. "Entertainment" is their word for good conversation, for music and dance, for food, for all that brings immediate pleasure and carries one forward.

A clock ticks out of the darkness behind us. Hugh Nolan shoves his chair back and makes his way along old routes over the clay of the floor, between the sharp edges of furniture, and returns, dropping turf on the fire and splashing it with oil. For an instant it blazes, bathing our faces in heat, then it settles again into its slow consuming of itself. Mr. Nolan tells us that the radio predicted frost, but, he reminds us, it has been a good year. The crop was bountiful, the cattle are fat. We agree.

A click of the latch announces another ceilier. "Well, men," a voice says. "How's Packie?" Hugh Nolan asks. "The best," replies Johnny's brother, squeezing between Tom and me on the wooden thing Mr. Nolan uses for a bed. He bends forward, opening his palms to the fire, and tells us that the radio predicted frost. This news raises its chorus of agreement, then the chat sinks and shreds. The clock ticks. Shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee, we crowd around the fire. The white cat is purring in my lap. Packie is whistling snatches of old reels under his breath. Outside the winds creak in the hedges and rattle the bones of the trees, while we hold to the topic of weather, not a trite topic for farming people whose well-being depends on the climate, whose work is conducted outdoors, whose houses do not allow them to forget. Inside and outside, it is cold and dark. The wind pops the tin of the roof, demanding that we speak of the weather. "There would not be weather the like of this now in America," Johnny says, asking. The question is courteously indirect. I am not made to perform, and months ago I would not have been forced, however obliquely, to entertain the company, but I am no longer a stranger, so I describe cold weather in America and am led to tell what I know of Iceland, drawn from the sagas and William Morris' diary of his travels. A little time passes, and the hearth's small flame shows Hugh Nolan to be at work in the enormity of his memory. A light gleams in the shadows beneath his cap.

The wind, rising and falling and pounding with the rhythms of the ocean, blows great winds into the mind and great winds carry tales. A shy smile breaks in the shadows, and I expect, and I imagine others expect, to

hear again of John Brodison, one of the wits of Hugh's youth, who told of the night so windy that he saw a haystack with a man clinging to its side blown down the road past the chapel. Instead, he reminds us of George Armstrong. All of us know him from stories Mr. Nolan has used in the past to pass the time. Armstrong emigrated to Australia, but, while others prosper abroad and return only to mock the penury of those who remain, Armstrong returned impoverished and so shriveled from cholera that his mother kept him in a wee basket at the hearth. But this was later. George had recovered and he was living in a small house at the Church of Ireland Rectory. We know the spot, at Bellanaleck, a few miles distant. The Orange Hall stands there and an old gray church and the store where people go to buy life's little necessities. It was wet, this day in the past, and the men who had come to cut timber were driven for shelter into George's house. The picture forms in our minds. Aye, we understand.

"And it wasn't very long till the rector come in." It makes sense that the Protestant rector, escaping the storm and seeking entertainment, would join the workers in George's home, for George Armstrong was a great star. He glittered against the darkness around him. Mr. Nolan continues:

"So they joined to talk about storms and about—ye'd often hear tell of the windy night of eighteen and thirty-nine. It done a lot of damage in Ireland that night.

"So the rector says, I heared a lot about the damage that was done, the windy night, but some way or another, he says, I think that a lot of it wasn't the case. Because if a storm was traveling at the rate it was traveling, it would have swept a little country like Ireland away altogether."

The rector's bid, his witty comment, sends a little laugh around the hearth, but we know Armstrong is the star, so we do not delay but hasten Mr. Nolan with yes and aye to hear George's retort.

"Ah now, says George, wait'll I tell ye, your reverence.

"John MacManus, he says, had a pup in a barrel at the end of the house.

"And the pup was blew out of the barrel and it was blew in through a window at Lisbellaw."

Now we can laugh. Lisbellaw lies east of Bellanaleck, across the width of Lough Erne. We continue laughing, more because it feels good than because the story was good, more to join together than to take pleasure from the small farmer's victory in a match of wit. Hugh Nolan is free to laugh with us, for his story was not focused upon himself. He is a historian, the curator and donor of the wealth of the past. "Oh now," he says laughing, cracking another match. He has reminded his neighbors of the genius of a man like themselves. He puffs and chuckles, and we shift as one, smiling, while Mr. Nolan tells us that Armstrong told the rector about his sister who had emigrated to America. As the next story begins, we remove our eyes

from him and return them into the ashes, leaving him alone in the vaults of his mind, and, while he shapes thoughts into words, we fill the tiny pauses that follow each line of his tale with quick, quiet encouragement—"Aye," "Man dear," "That's a sight"—urging him forward and helping him locate the proper pace of narration.

"She went to America when she was a young girl." Mr. Nolan's pipe is nested in his great fists. He is looking, as we are looking, into the fire. "Aye," some one of us says. Many have gone away to America. "Aye, indeed."

"And she kept writing to the mother continually.

"And she was always planning to come home. But she never came.

"And still the letters came from her.

"But anyhow, there was a twelve weeks' frost. And the Atlantic Ocean, it froze, the whole way over till America.

"So, she had heard tell of people coming and going on the ice.

"And she thought that she'd try it herself, and that she'd go home to see the *mother*.

"And she had a bicycle.

"And she came out on Boston Street at nine o'clock in the morning.

"And she went to get on the bicycle. And the bicycle slipped and she fell on the street.

"There come a policeman along, and he lifted the bicycle, and he came to where she was standing.

"And he threw his arm around her, and he left her sitting on the saddle.

"He says, You go on now.

"So she left Boston at nine o'clock.

"And she was at Bellanaleck Cross at half three in the evening."

Together we laugh and congratulate Hugh Nolan. The storyteller's goal is not verbal trickery but clarity, the smooth, precise, spare realization of a concept in words. He was wholly successful, the master of his gift, and the deep light burns in his eyes. "Well," he says, "George told that to the rector anyway." We imagine the rector's amusement, and it adds to our own. Hugh says, "George says to him, she was the first for to introduce a bicycle into this country." These farmers who ride black bikes through a world arranged for the convenience of automobiles get one last little laugh.

We are warm now. Hours remain before we part, moving over the lanes to our separate homes, and nothing else happens. But Mr. Nolan's story was enough. Not much, ten minutes out of six hours, but it was enough so that tomorrow, when we meet on the road and turn our backs to the wet winds for a trade of cigarettes and matches, we can call the night before a good one.

CONNECTIONS

When one old star on a bad cold night told the men gathered around him of another old star on a bad wet day who entertained the men around him by whipping the weather into a joke, he made two connections simultaneously and gracefully. One is the connection linking the teller of the tale with the source of the tale. The other is the connection linking the teller and the members of his audience. Hugh Nolan knew and admired George Armstrong, and he kept faith with the past through the accurate and artful restatement of the dead man's tale. He knew the men at his hearth, and he gave them something that would amuse them in the moment and carry them forward with a memory worth having. In preserving the artistic tradition he shared with a man of the past while communicating with the men of the present, Hugh Nolan asserted himself into time, bundling up the past to make it a gift to the future, and he positioned himself responsibly within society by pulling the people of his place into deeper association. To unify time and society—tradition and communication—in a narrative is to tell a folktale.

When an outsider, like myself, intrudes and claims a relationship to a tale by freezing the social arrangements of the instant into a text in ink, the unity that the storyteller achieves breaks apart, space opens, and problems arise. Hugh Nolan could answer the call of his personal muse and meet the obligations he owed history by repeating George Armstrong's story. His art and Armstrong's shared genre and style. But the aesthetic conventions and creative urges of the writer who retells folktales do not necessarily converge with those of the storyteller. Hugh Nolan knew his audience; their values ran toward oneness. He knew which ideas of significance would engage and aid the men around him, and he found those ideas in a story already set in his mind. But the ideas that move writers and their audiences do not necessarily mesh with the values built into the stories that writers discover and then attempt to re-create on the page. While striving to do anew what the storyteller has already done, connecting to a source and an audience while weaving a text, the writer meets and solves new problems.

Problems do not lie in the mere presence of an outsider. It is not strange to find a stranger at the hospitable hearth. The rector was an outsider at George Armstrong's. I was an outsider at Hugh Nolan's. But we did not retard, we probably encouraged, the storyteller's art. Problems arise when the tale that brought its teller, his source, and his audience together is relocated in a new literary context. Then dislocations appear as a result of the distance that opens between the writer and the storyteller, and confusions arise from the different motives that writers and storytellers have for telling their tales to others.

All printed texts of folktales are compromises between the written and the spoken word, between writers and storytellers. To understand the Irish folktales that we can read, let us consider together two relationships and the questions they entail. First is the relationship of the narrator and the source, the connection of tradition in which the question is: how do we approach and treat seriously the art of another? Second is the relationship of the narrator and the audience, the connection of communication in which the question is: why has the tale been preserved and told again?

TRADITION

At the beginning of the modern study of the Irish folktale stands a sprightly serious man, T. Crofton Croker. Descended from Elizabethan English settlers of Cork, and the son of a British army officer, Croker was born in the year of the Rising of 1798. He left Ireland at the age of twenty and in 1850 retired from his position as a senior clerk of the first class of the Admiralty in London. He was a dutiful civil servant and he was an artist, friend of the painter Maclise, husband to the daughter of the English watercolorist Francis Nicholson, and he was a writer, correspondent of Thomas Moore and Sir Walter Scott, who surrounded himself in England with authors who knew his native Ireland, the novelist Maria Edgeworth, the poet F. S. Mahony, the antiquarian Thomas Wright, the travelers Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall. Thomas Crofton Croker claims our attention because, as Richard Dorson writes in *The British Folklorists,* he was the first person in the English-speaking world who set out to collect and publish the texts of folktales. Croker called his pursuit a "sport." He wrote of "hunting up and bagging all the old 'grey superstitions.' "

In Croker's day it was not unusual for ladies and gentlemen to delight in antiquarian hobbies. Croker was not alone in recording the details of fallen gravestones and ruined churches, but when he was only fourteen he discovered for himself that "ancient and decaying" antiquities not only lay upon the Irish earth, they lived, if only dimly, in the minds of elderly people. From 1812 to 1815 he traveled Ireland, and later he returned from England, adventuring "in caves and out of caves, upon hill-tops, with bootmakers and broguemakers, with smugglers and coastguard-men, with magistrates and murderers, with pilgrims and pedlars" to build his monument, his admirable stack of books.

A natural gulf yawned between this Protestant gentleman and the people whose traditions called him. When he began to gather their art into his own, he possessed no ready genre, no convention to guide his effort. He tried different techniques. In his first great work, *Researches in the South of Ireland,* published in 1824, he alternates between two literary modes, the

travel account and the antiquarian description. Neither of them suggested that he should present the beliefs he met upon the land as distinct texts. He plunged through the words of the people to pluck out conceptual essences. These he framed into generalizations that took historical significance from the comparisons he made between his findings and the words of the authors of olden times. In his landmark chapter, "Fairies and Supernatural Agency," he first informs his reader of the similarity of Irish and Scottish belief, and then, skirting the issue of ultimate origins, whether they lay in the East or in the North, he provides an account, running for twenty smooth pages, of the Irish fairy faith.

A century and a half later I would be told that the Iron Age raths, the "forths" that stand atop thousands of Irish hills, are fairy places, best to avoid. Croker put it succinctly in 1824:

"The circular intrenchments and barrows, known by the name of Danish forts, in Ireland, are pointed out as the abode of fairy communities, and to disturb their habitation, in other words to dig, or plough up a rath or fort, whose construction the superstitious natives ascribe to the labour and ingenuity of the 'good people,' is considered as unlucky and entailing some severe disaster on the violator and his kindred. An industrious peasant, who purchased a farm in the neighbourhood of Mallow, from a near relative of mine, commenced his improvements by building upon it a good stone house, together with a lime-kiln. Soon after, he waited on the proprietor, to state 'the trouble he was come to by reason of the old fort, the fairies not approving of his having placed the lime-kiln so near their dwelling;—he had lost his sow with nine *bonniveens* (sucking pigs), his horse fell into a quarry and was killed, and three of his sheep died, "all through the means of the fairies." ' Though the lime-kiln had cost him five guineas, he declared he would never burn another stone in it, but take it down, without delay, and build one away from the fort, saying, he was wrong in putting that kiln in the way of the 'good people,' who were thus obliged to go out of their usual track. The back door of his house unfortunately also faced the same fort, but this offence was obviated by almost closing it up, leaving only a small hole at the top, to allow the good people free passage, should they require it. In these raths, fairies are represented as holding their festive meetings, and entering into all the fantastic and wanton mirth that music and glittering banquets are capable of inspiring."

Crofton Croker's topic was the whole of the land and its tradition, and it made sense for him in the sweep of his narrative to generalize from his experience and to quote sparingly. In our own day we find Irish custom and belief treated similarly in the magnificent books written by the geographer E. Estyn Evans. But as Croker worked, his focus tightened on the stories and songs of the country people. Our word "folklore" had not yet been invented, but Croker became a folklorist. He followed his first book with two series of *Fairy Legends,* 1825 and 1828, and one volume of *Popular Songs of Ireland* in 1839. Concentrating upon stories while compiling *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland,* Croker became obliged to present folktales as texts, ungeneralized and particular, but his own tradition offered him no genre of presentation. Though his books brought him fame and colleagues, he was nearly alone at first, and he had to invent some way to get oral stories into print. He tried two ways. Both not only survived through the successive editions of the *Fairy Legends,* both continued to be employed throughout the nineteenth century by Irish writers.

Croker developed one of his styles of folktale presentation from the literary genre of the sketch, in which a journalistic observation is shaped into a sparkling essay or amusing story. Sketching the folktale, Croker retold it in his own words, providing his reader with a piece of entertainment while establishing an artful tension between his diction and culture and those of his characters. Out of that tension a little humor arose.

The old teller of tale like Hugh Nolan brings his style and the style of his source into oneness. The writer of sketches shoves them apart, clarifying distinctions of style and class. What is most remarkable about Crofton Croker, standing there at the beginning, is that he felt no insecure need to make that distinction radical. He enjoys the ripple of his own prose, its light tone and learned allusions, but he restrains it, keeps it plain and direct, and when he quotes the country people he preserves their words without exaggerating them grotesquely. Other writers, though, pleasured in stretching the real social and cultural distance that lay between them and their subjects. Thomas Keightley, like Croker Irish and a founder of the discipline of folklore, carped that Croker had published stories that were his. Reclaiming his contribution during his global survey, *The Fairy Mythology* of 1828, Keightley gives us a tool to measure the distance between Croker and himself. Keightley begins his tale "The Leprechaun in the Garden" like this: "There's a sort o' people that every body must have met wid sumtime or another. I mane thim people that purtinds not to b'lieve in things that in their hearts they *do* b'lieve in, an' are mortially afeard o' too." Croker's "Seeing Is Believing" opens, "There's a sort of people whom every one must have met with some time or other; people that pretend to disbelieve what, in their hearts, they believe and are afraid of." The disbeliever is Felix O'Driscoll, who hears an old woman in a public house recount capturing a fairy who promises her wealth, but she turns her head for an instant and he is gone. "He slipped out o' my fingers," writes Keightley, "just as iv he

was med o' fog or smoke, an' the sarra the fut he iver come nigh my garden agin." Croker's conclusion runs, "He slipped out of my hand just as if he was made of fog or smoke, and the sorrow the foot he ever came nigh my garden again."

There is an argument to be made for recording dialect, but misspelling little words serves science less than it serves the gentleman who wants to shake a cheap laugh out of his reader, and who, even more, wishes not to be confused with the people of the story.

Orthographic choices separate Croker and Keightley and likely signal differences in personality. Croker, though a gentleman, stepped toward the people. Though an exile in England, he remained connected to the Ireland of his birth and raising. Keightley denigrated Croker and Croker's folk and withdrew into erudite isolation. More deeply, however, Croker and Keightley were joined by a commitment to science. They spelled words differently but reported substantially the same text. No such commitment checked Samuel Lover. Born in Dublin a year before Croker, nine years after Keightley, Lover was an artist, a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy, who followed Croker closely with two series of *Legends and Stories of Ireland* and one book of *Songs of Ireland*. His sketches stretched into extravaganzas, their plots flung to wild extremes, their peasants set to kicking with preposterous result inside the English language.

At its most farcical limit, the sketch retains virtues. For one thing, when the gentleman elaborates upon folk belief and creates a comic fiction, he is not acting at variance with the country people who do the same thing. For another, the humorously sketched folktale was, as Samuel Lover makes clear, a popular upper-class oral genre, appropriate for after-dinner entertainment. While we may think of folktales as the sole possession of the unlettered and impecunious, all people tell stories, and the writers of sketches have preserved for us examples of the verbal art of the wealthy classes of times past. If our interest lies only in the country people and their art, then we will find the sketches containing kernels of traditional tale. Though the sketchers were tempted by demons of invention, Crofton Croker eliminated from his first edition tales of his own, and even Samuel Lover labels clearly the product of his own imagination. And in addition, while dressing stories up into sketches, the old authors sometimes provide us with information that modern folklorists have learned to cherish about the tellers, their personalities and occupations, and about the physical and social and conversational settings out of which stories emerge. So Samuel Lover does more than report a folktale he heard from one Paddy the Sport. He tells about Paddy, "a tall, loose-made, middle-aged man . . . fond of wearing an oil-skinned hat and a red waistcoat . . . , and an admirable hand at filling a game-bag or emptying a whisky-flask." Paddy was a "professed story-teller and a

notorious liar" who "dealt largely in fairy tales and ghost stories," and we hear samples of his fare before Lover sets him in a gentleman's hall where his cleverness outstrips the rich people around him, winning him the right to tell a tale about a fox whose wit makes a man a fool. If Lover leaves us something, Croker bequeaths more, and the incidental detail with which he decorates his tales is as much to be treasured as the stories themselves, for it carries us into the presence of other people in other times.

Crofton Croker retold most of the stories that he included in the *Fairy Legends*, but the sketch was not his only experiment. His tale "The Crookened Back" begins with information on the teller, Peggy Barrett, who "like all experienced story-tellers, suited her tales, both in length and subject, to the audience and the occasion." A clear, uninterrupted text follows. Then "there was a pause," and Croker describes the varieties of reaction among the listeners, some who had heard the story, some who had not. That was no sketch but a model report of a folktale, and after "The Capture of Bridget Purcell," Croker notes, "This narrative was taken down verbatim from the lips of a poor cottager in the county Limerick, by Miss Maria Dickson, 22nd April, 1825."

So, there at the beginning, we find two distinct ways to get an orally delivered narrative onto the page. One was to remake it into a piece of prose in conformity with the reigning rules of literary art. The other was to record the text in the words of its own author, unaltered by the outsider, whose task was restricted to translating sounds into letters. From that time to the present, every writer of Irish folktales has had to decide whether to honor literary convention through reinvention or folk art through transcription.

In the days of Croker and Lover, one solution to the Irish writer's dilemma was devised by William Carleton. Glance over the sketches Carleton arranged into his immensely popular *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* of 1842 and you might be reminded of Samuel Lover, whose "unrivalled wit and irresistable drollery" Carleton admired, but probe more deeply and you will find his stories saturated with a strange darkness. Some seem affectionate, others mean, some funny, some somber. Carleton was not like those writers who could maintain their distance and their tone. They were born to be Protestant gentlemen, but he was born poor and Catholic, "a peasant's son" in rural Tyrone. He left the country for Dublin, converted to Protestantism, and confected out of his wide reading a literary style that enabled him to stand alongside the witty and wealthy, recomposing his memories into sketches filled with rural folk who speak and behave strangely. But Carleton's great heart ached. He protested that he had never been estranged from the people of his youth. His virtue, he wrote, was that he knew them, had danced and laughed and gotten drunk with them. His

goal was serious, the defense and improvement of his people, so before he releases his readers into the *Traits and Stories*, he enjoins them to abandon their prejudices, and after his rollicking, painful tale was told, he added another book, *Tales and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, in which he offers some of the tales again but narrated in a more straightforward manner, like Croker at his best. William Carleton provides two versions of the same tale. His solution was to construct for himself two contexts, one in which, through fiction, he answers the call of art, another in which, through essays, he answers the call of science. Nothing so neat, though, would suit William Carleton. He could not help but make the peoples' tales his own, for he and they were one in blood and earth. So he mounted the complicated literary apparatus he had mastered in Dublin and drove it into the heart of the tradition. At the end of *Tales and Stories*, Carleton, now learned, now prosperous, merges with his people once more, retelling an old folktale of a blacksmith who beats the Devil, and witnessing to the rural belief in ghosts, with all the literary might he could muster.

William Carleton is no man for easy schemes, yet his works yield three approaches to the folktale. In one, he utilizes the tale as a colorful element in a piece of his own in which the styles of the author and his characters, their diction and conduct, are set distinctly apart. The author, like Chaucer on the road to Canterbury, is an observer, amused, amazed, confused, offended. In another, Carleton takes the tale over and tells it again to suit a new audience, much as Shakespeare made old tales into new drama. The author becomes a storyteller, at one with the tradition. William Butler Yeats called William Carleton a "novelist" and a "storyteller" and a "historian," and the third of Carleton's approaches, the historian's, was to present the tale as a fact, worthy of preservation for the information it contains about people who are not the author. William Carleton, who was born in 1794 and who died in 1869, was an exact contemporary of Croker, Keightley, and Lover, and he epitomizes their period, the period of Thomas Moore, James Clarence Mangan, Gerald Griffin, and the first maturing of Irish literature in the English language. Carleton had two ways to make folklore into literature, the Chaucerian and the Shakespearean. At the same time, he was interested in folklore as it flourished in country places far removed from the drawing room and the office of the literary gazette. But Carleton was too close to the people, too bothered by his separation from them, to perfect his own solution to the problem of the relationship between the writer and the storyteller. That would wait until the nineteenth century was at an end. Then the perfection of Carleton's solution would become a fundamental principle of the movement that spun around William Butler Yeats and generated out of Ireland the greatest body of literature in the modern world.

"Folk art," wrote W. B. Yeats, closing *The Celtic Twilight*, "is, indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted." So grandly did Yeats' own art flower from the tradition of his nation that when age began settling upon him, he was elected a senator of the new Irish Free State, and in the next year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. In Stockholm in 1923, addressing the Swedish Royal Academy, he said that when he received the Nobel medal, two others should have been standing beside him, "an old woman sinking into the infirmity of age, and a young man's ghost": Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge.

Together with Lady Gregory, Yeats had collected folktales. Each of them published clear texts, fresh from the lips of country people. Both built original works of art out of their experiences with the Irish tradition. But John Synge, because his life was brutally short, and because he was attracted both to science and art, provides us with the simplest case of the successful dynamic of their movement.

When Synge met Yeats in Paris in 1896, Yeats was the author of *The Wanderings of Oisin, The Countess Cathleen, The Land of Heart's Desire,* and *The Celtic Twilight*. He had edited a volume of Carleton's sketches and assembled two anthologies, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* and *Irish Fairy Tales*, intermingling old texts from Croker, Lover, and Carleton with newly collected stories from Douglas Hyde. His career was more than begun. Synge, six years his junior, had published verse in the manner of Wordsworth, whom he admired for his clarity, but he had not yet found his voice. Still, there was much in Synge to appeal to Yeats. Like Lady Gregory he came of an old Irish Protestant family. In Irish matters, he was a nationalist. Politically, he was a socialist. He had read William Morris, who encouraged Yeats' early interest in folklore and efforts in poetry, and whom Yeats would always call "my chief of men." John Synge wandered alone in youth through the Wicklow hills, meeting the country people and becoming a serious naturalist. Contemplating Darwin in isolated terror, he denounced Christianity. In college at Trinity in Dublin, an interest in Irish antiquities led him through study of the Irish language into familiarity with ancient Irish literature. Paris may have been the place for an aspiring poet, but Synge's calling was higher than sprinkling pages with pretty words. "Give up Paris," Yeats told him. "Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression."

John Synge did not go to the Arans immediately, and when he did it cannot have been easy for him. Bedeviled by pains in his body, big but

natively shy, Synge entertained his hosts with little magic tricks and set up his music stand in the kitchen to perform upon the violin, for he had trained at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. None of his four trips to the Arans was long, he drew his friends from the margins of society and spent much time lying on his back and watching the clouds go east, yet his experience there gave him his career and the book he wrote to tell of his adventure is a masterpiece.

The Aran Islands brings together Synge's interests in evolution and socialism. That mix characterized the folklore scholarship of his period, when folk culture was defined as a survival from an earlier evolutionary stage, marked by a generous and happy collective spirit. But Synge's book was not conventional folklore writing, which was one reason it took years to find its publisher. Nor was *The Aran Islands* anything like the old sketches of peasant life, though the sketching idea remained alive in hands like those of Seumas MacManus. And Synge's book was not journalism. Its prose was clear and new and beautiful. John Synge observed like a naturalist, and like others of his time who belonged to naturalists' clubs in Ireland, he was a pioneer photographer of rural life. He observed like a naturalist and wrote like a poet to invent a new genre of emotional ethnography.

While *The Aran Islands* was being rejected by a series of publishers, John Synge entered a state of white-hot creativity. In six years he wrote all of his plays, all but one influenced by his time on the Arans, two of them founded directly upon traditional narratives he heard there. Familiarity with the idea of the sketch breeds misunderstanding of Synge's achievement. He does not depict Irish life as it is or was, but like the old teller of tales, he enters and enacts the Irish consciousness. Do not think of the country people he knew as playing upon the stage but as sitting beside him in the darkened theater, laughing and crying and twitching at his restatement of their ideas.

"All art," John Synge said, "is a collaboration." No mere association between like-minded artists, the collaboration that powered his movement unified the artist with the national tradition. This is the structure of collaboration: in order to locate deep truths and to gain wide appeal, to avoid the trivializing constraints of academic endeavor, the artist roots his work in the folk culture and then accepts two responsibilities: to preserve the old tradition intact for the future; to do battle with the tradition so as to answer the needs of the self while creating new works for new worlds. In *The Aran Islands* and its companion, *In Wicklow and West Kerry*, Synge recorded the old ways as Lady Gregory said the folklorist should, with patience and reverence. All of his plays bear a relation to the tradition and two of them at least, *Riders to the Sea* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, are among the first great works of modern drama.

John Synge's oeuvre provides one pristine example of the perfection of Carleton's solution. In *The Aran Islands* he quotes Pat Dirane's folktale from which his play *In the Shadow of the Glen* was constructed. The story that inspired *The Playboy* is not presented as a text, and the rest of his plays are less specifically drawn from folk art. Scientist and artist, John Synge was an artist first, so we will relocate the center of his movement by balancing him with Douglas Hyde, who did write plays based on folktales, but who dedicated himself primarily to the collection and preservation of folklore.

Only Ireland could choose a folklorist for its first president. Douglas Hyde's election in 1937 capped a career that commenced in serious linguistic study. The son of a Protestant minister from Roscommon, Hyde studied Hebrew and Greek and Irish at Trinity. To improve his Irish, he went into the countryside, listened to the aged speakers, and wrote down their stories and songs. To preserve Irish, he founded the Gaelic League in 1893. The League extended its mission from linguistic to national revival and provided the context in which the spirit of rebellion was nurtured until it broke forth in war in 1916. While others pressed toward armed action, Hyde withdrew to protect his culture by writing his monumental *Literary History of Ireland* and by publishing, between 1889 and 1939, a sequence of volumes filled with folk texts.

Douglas Hyde, wrote William Butler Yeats, "knows the people thoroughly. . . . His work is neither humorous nor mournful; it is simply life." Accuracy was Hyde's concern. He surveyed the works that preceded his own in a kindly mood, but still found their stories manipulated, padded, and cooked. "Attempts," he wrote in *Beside the Fire*, published in 1890, "have been made from time to time during the present century to collect Irish folk-lore, but these attempts, though interesting from a literary point of view, are not always successes from a scientific one." Art and science obey different rules. Before Hyde, some writers of folktales leaned more toward art, others more toward science, but all created imperfect blends. In Hyde's day, his friends W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Synge separated science and art and performed differently in different contexts to meet different responsibilities. After Hyde, division became complete. Some devoted themselves to art, others to science.

In 1902, W. B. Yeats and James Joyce met for the first time on a street in Dublin. Joyce told the poet that his reliance on folklore was a sign of his deterioration. Yeats constructed a long counterargument, contending that art depends on the popular tradition to prevent the pursuit of individualism from ending in sterility. The twenty-year-old Joyce replied, or so Yeats tells it, that it was a pity Yeats was too old to receive his influence. The next year Joyce met Synge, read *Riders to the Sea* and did not like it, and reviewing Lady Gregory's new *Poets and Dreamers* he described her storytellers as

senile, feeble, and sleepy. Then the next year, with a little gift from Lady Gregory in his pocket, Joyce flew by the nets of home and religion to lodge in exile. Early in *Ulysses*, when the clever college boys speak of Hyde and Synge and "that old hake Gregory," they do so to divorce themselves from the dominant Irish literary movement of their day, but the adult Joyce incorporated the school of Yeats and about everything else into his unreadable masterpiece named after a folksong, *Finnegans Wake*. In it James Joyce makes the Irish land, its rivers and ancient murmurs, heroic to the modern world, and from Joyce on, profoundly in Samuel Beckett, contentiously in Patrick Kavanagh, hilariously in Flann O'Brien, sublimely in the verse of the major poetic school of our day, that of Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, Seamus Heaney, and Richard Murphy, the Irish land and its people and their art have continued to prove inspiring and worthy of defeat. But the work of preserving folklore has been taken up by others, committed first to science.

Three years after the rebels put down their guns and Ireland won a moment of peace, the Folklore of Ireland Society was founded and James Delargy, once assistant to Douglas Hyde, became editor of its journal, *Béaloideas*. Delargy argued that the preservation of folklore served more than the scientist's curiosity and did more than supply raw materials to artists. It was essential to the maintenance of a distinct national culture. He appealed for state support, and when funds were granted to establish the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935, he was named director. Delargy brought to Dublin a schoolteacher from Kerry named Sean O'Sullivan, then sent him for training to Sweden so that he could become the Commission's archivist, charged with the organization of the materials gathered by the Commission's full-time collectors. None of the collectors were university men. They came out of the country, received Ediphone recorders and instruction in verbatim transcription, and returned into the countryside. New men were in command of the Irish tradition. They were not outsiders but people of the people. I have listened to Sean O'Sullivan tell the old story of the man who had no story, and I have caroused around Dublin with Michael J. Murphy, then followed him across Ulster by reading the superb diaries that he, like the other collectors, has deposited in the archive. Michael J. Murphy returned from the place of his birth, Liverpool, to the place of his people, south Armagh, where he invented the idea of folklore for himself and composed a fine book, *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*. Immediately afterward, in 1941, Delargy invited him to become the Commission's collector for Ulster east of Donegal. Murphy is a playwright and a novelist, but he shines most brightly in his account of his adventures in the field, *Tyrone Folk Quest*, and in his book of Northern folktales, *Now You're Talking . . .*, published in 1975. Men like Murphy, working and reworking their territories, have made the Irish Folklore Commission—since 1971 the Department of Irish Folklore of the University of Dublin College at Belfield, and now headed by Bo Almqvist—the greatest repository of folklore in the world. From its million and a half pages, its archivists, Sean O'Sullivan and Séamas Ó Catháin, have extracted and published rich collections of folktale.

From Douglas Hyde to the present, from written dictation to the tape recorder, the progress of Irish folklore has been marked by steady improvement in the accuracy with which the words of the speakers of story have been preserved. Today, listening to the tale on tape over and over again, we can get all the words exactly right—and more. Listening again, while trying to capture on paper the stories I recorded during a decade in a small hilly place in County Fermanagh, in the southwestern corner of Northern Ireland, it became plain to me that transcriptions rendered as though they were prose distorted and muted the storyteller's art. Using italics and capital letters to signal loudness helped some, and reading the new scholarship on American Indian myths helped more. Dell Hymes argues convincingly that Indian narratives are structured poetically. Now, the stories I have recorded in Ireland are not poetry, but they are not prose either. So, I have struggled to jettison literary conventions and learned to follow subtle signs in the teller's presentation—repetitive words that start sections and sharp silences that close them—to produce transcriptions that not only include all the teller's words but also indicate something about the rhythms of narration. The result is a text composed of short paragraphs, often of only one sentence, that break up occasionally for dramatic effect. In the future, as we follow in the direction Douglas Hyde pointed, we will discover still better ways to get onto the page the purest representation of what the storyteller said.

We writers of folktale have decided that our basic obligation is to our sources. Our goal is to free ourselves from our own tradition so that we can approach other traditions directly. Our science exists to honor the storyteller's art.

COMMUNICATION

Once we have determined that our duty is to record folktales exactly and lovingly in the words of their narrators, the question remains of which tales to record and present to the reader. Its answer depends upon our motives, and different motives have driven scholars out of the study and into the field and guided them while they wrote. Return again to the beginning, to T. Crofton Croker.

Croker wished to amuse his readers, but sincere storytellers like Crofton

Croker and Hugh Nolan enter the act of communication with motives deeper than amusement. Introducing the complete edition of the *Fairy Legends* that he compiled out of affection for his recently deceased friend, Thomas Wright wrote that "the real importance" of Croker's stories lay in their "historical and ethnological" implications.

With amazing speed during Croker's era, scholars developed a theory encompassing history and ethnology that was to form the basis of folklore's first major scheme for research, the historic-geographic method. The method's goal is to read unwritten history out of spatial distributions. It commences in the recognition that stories told in distant places carry the same basic form. Comparison of these story types, alive in the minds of modern narrators, suggests connections between far-flung populations and leads toward the reconstruction of ancient histories.

"It is curious to observe the similarity of legends, and of ideas concerning imaginary beings, among nations that for ages have had scarcely any communication," Crofton Croker wrote, and in the notes that follow his tales, he not only connects new and old Irish stories and remarks similarities between Irish and Scottish, Welsh and English traditions, he ranges farther, finding parallels in Spain and Italy, in Germany and Denmark. At the end of one legend, in which a hill in Cork gains its name from a bottle out of which magical helpers popped, he calls attention to German and Eastern analogues and comments that "Mr. Pisani, formerly secretary to Lord Strangford and now in the embassy at Constantinople, relates a tale similar to the Legend of Bottle-hill, which was told him when a child by his nurse, who was a Greek woman." Even Samuel Lover, who counseled serious persons—"your masters of art, your explorers of science, star-gazing philosophers, and moon-struck maidens"—to lay his book aside, for laughter was his purpose, still follows his sketch in which a man saves himself from his compact with the Devil with the note that the tale "is somewhat common to the legendary lore of other countries—at least, there is a German legend built on a similar foundation." Despite his wish to amuse, Lover contributed to comparative study, and Croker was adamantly clear as to his purpose: "My aim has been to bring the twilight tales of the peasantry before the view of the philosopher."

The international nature of Croker's stories immediately attracted the brothers Grimm, whose translation of his work appeared within a year of the publication of the first edition in 1825. A French translation followed, and when in 1828 Croker's second series of Irish legends arrived, it came in company with a third volume containing Welsh legends and a lengthy essay by Wilhelm Grimm analyzing the Irish tales and setting them into a broad European context. Croker was no longer alone. He was part of a wide

scholarly movement within which the international comparative perspective was dominant.

Folklore's comparative method was achieving its first mature formulation in Finland while Douglas Hyde was at work on the first scientific collections of Irish tale. In 1890, in the preface to *Beside the Fire*, Hyde grouped the stories of Ireland into two classes. One contained the wonder tales that folklorists, in homage to the Grimms, term *Märchen*, and it contained fairy legends. The other consisted of the poetic and marvelous adventures of Finn and the Fianna. The tales of the first class, Irish by adoption, deserved study for what they told about "our old Aryan heritage." The tales of the second class, the Fenian tales, were shared with Scotland as a result of ancient Irish colonization, but they were Irish distinctly and profoundly. They were important for the Gaelic language in which they were spoken and for the old culture of which they were part, the culture that was not English and could provide inspiration for the formation of a new Irish nation.

Add the idea of the Gaelic League to the idea of the historic-geographic school of folklore study, add nationalism to internationalism, and you have the twin motives that powered the great work of the Irish Folklore Commission. As the Commission's archivist, Sean O'Sullivan struggled manfully and successfully to bring the massive collection into usable order. In his guide for fieldworkers, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, he listed the tales of Ireland in accordance with the international index developed by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, and he added a typology of the Fenian tale. Then, working with Reidar Christiansen of Norway, he classified 43,000 tales into the Aarne-Thompson system, so you can find, for instance, that over 650 versions have been reported from Ireland of type 300, in which a hero slays three giants and then a sea monster to win the hand of a princess. When Sean O'Sullivan mobilized his unrivaled knowledge of the Irish folktale to pull from the archive his collection *Folktales of Ireland*, published in 1966, he emphasized the same classes of story that Hyde did: tales that connected Ireland to the world and tales in which Ireland's most ancient tradition glistens. But those are not the only tales told in Ireland, so at the end of his book O'Sullivan adds others, and in two other collections he stresses stories that are not to be found in the indexes or in the Fenian tradition, tales of kinds that claimed the attention of Hyde's friend Lady Gregory.

Lady Gregory was recently widowed and teaching herself Irish when she encountered two new books on Irish folklore, one by W. B. Yeats, the other by Douglas Hyde. Suddenly an old interest of hers took form and purpose. She invited them to her home, Coole in Galway; the collaboration that would produce the Abbey Theatre was about to begin. Yeats came first.

It was the same year in which Yeats met John Synge and sent him to the Arans. Soon after, Lady Gregory was out in the field "collecting fairy lore." In the next year, 1897, she was distracting Yeats from work he could not do by taking him from house to house to record old stories. They went together and both wore black, but their motives were not the same.

Yeats, inspired by William Morris, was full of hatred for the cheap materialistic side of the modern age, and he sought the fairy faith as part of his diverse, desperate quest for the spiritual. He called in the countryside for witnesses to the reality of the other world. Lady Gregory joined him and when her "big book of folklore," *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, was at last published in 1920 with essays by Yeats at the back, it stood, as it continues to stand, as the greatest work produced out of the Irish interest in mystery that began in Croker's *Researches in the South of Ireland*, that embraced Oscar's parents, Sir William and Lady Wilde, in the days before Yeats, and that continues to call serious students of folklore.

W. B. Yeats desired proof of the limited vision of factual man, but when Lady Gregory heard stories, she "cared less for the evidence given in them than for the beautiful rhythmic sentences in which they were told." The words and cadences that she recorded taught her the language she would use in her own plays and in her translations of the old Irish epics. That language, praised by Yeats for being as beautiful as Morris and as true as Burns, inspired John Synge, helping him to shape his dramatic diction. Lady Gregory's fine ear provided the art of her movement with a voice and it made her one of the first great modern folklorists. On collecting trips with Yeats or with Hyde, and more often alone in her Kiltartan district of Galway, she listened closely and recorded with precision "because folk-lorists in these days are expected to be as exact as workers at any other science." Committed first to language, Lady Gregory was not confined by scholarly conventions of story type. Though she produced a collection of *Märchen* in her *Kiltartan Wonder Book*, she was receptive to new kinds of tale. Before her, the Dublin bookseller Patrick Kennedy, working to preserve the folk traditions of his native Wexford, had expanded his collections of international tale to include a few religious and historical texts. Out of each of these neglected varieties, Lady Gregory would construct a major collection. Protestant scholars tended to treat Irish faith as a pagan survival, but Lady Gregory faced the Catholicism of her people directly. In *A Book of Saints and Wonders*, published in 1906, she tells legends of the Irish saints and preserves testimony of Irish religiosity. Aristocratic scholars shied away from Irish folk history, in which an alternative view of the past, rife with hostility toward the invader and the landlord, implied a rebellious future. But gently nationalistic Lady Gregory gathered a sampling of historical legends, of "myths in the making," into her *Kiltartan History Book*, published in 1909, expanded in 1926. Later Sean O'Sullivan would feature these kinds of tale, the religious and the historical, in two major collections, one in the journal *Béaloideas*, one formed as a book, *Legends from Ireland*, published in 1977.

Attending more to what the people have to say than to academic convention, Lady Gregory and Sean O'Sullivan, she because of her ear for speech, he because of his responsibility to the Irish nation, suggest a different motive for the presentation of folktale texts. Stories not only carry ancient and unwritten history, they manifest the living culture of the people.

Discovering the culture in the story as a motive for reporting folklore had been there from the beginning. Both Crofton Croker and Samuel Lover explain stories of fairy pots of gold and demons that guard hidden treasure as exhibitions of the deep Irish ambivalence over material wealth. But the ethnographic concern was brushed aside during the excited scholarly search for international tales that led outward away from Ireland and backward away from the people who tell the tales. Interest in tales as evidence of contemporary culture became largely the province of travelers who, like Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall in the nineteenth century, or Sean O'Faolain and Brendan Behan in the twentieth, encountered folktales as features of the places they went and retold them as emblems of the people they met.

One special traveler was the American Jeremiah Curtin. He was the son of Irish immigrant parents, a staff member of the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology, and an expert on American Indian mythology. In 1887 and again in 1892, he visited the West of Ireland to record *Märchen*, Fenian tales, and legends of ghosts and fairies. His knowledge of Irish was not deep, but guided by the principles in the new science of anthropology, Curtin, according to Douglas Hyde, "approached the fountainhead more nearly than any other."

Anthropology makes traveling into a profession and travel literature into scientific discourse. Modern Ireland has welcomed many anthropologists, most of them Americans, who have come to analyze the living culture. This they have done to suit the presuppositions of their science, and the tales in which the people bring their own culture into order have been left to folklorists like myself. But the American discipline of folklore within which I was trained springs from the same source as anthropology. So, like Douglas Hyde, I strive to record tales exactly, but what interests me is not the rare survival from times past; it is the culture of the people who share my times, my predicament. If a story interests the people I wish to understand, then I must learn to make it interest me too, whether or not it fits academic typologies, whether or not it preserves echoes of ancient thunder.

To bring you toward an understanding of Irish traditional culture, I have composed this book. Some of its stories are astoundingly old, some

are found scattered widely across the globe, but I chose them for what they teach about the contours of the Irish consciousness.

The stories will guide you. I have arranged them so that they speak among themselves, each providing context for the other, all bodying forth pieces of a noble culture, a culture unlike our own, against which we must test ourselves during our effort to shape a mature and reasonable way of life.

A LAST WORD

I have brought into this anthology stories from forty different books, and from Ireland's pair of fine journals, *Béaloideas* and *Ulster Folklife*. In partial fulfillment of an old promise to provide comic and mysterious tales to complement the historical stories I published from Ballymenone, the place I know in Ulster, I have added new texts from my dear friends Michael Boyle, Ellen Cutler, Hugh Nolan, and Joseph and Peter Flanagan. Mr. Boyle died in 1974, Joe Flanagan in 1979, Mrs. Cutler in 1980, Mr. Nolan in 1981. Peter Flanagan, God bless him, is with us yet. We had some drinks together and shared some nostalgic chat in his house on the hill at Christmas in 1983 while this book was beginning to form.

The one book I did not plunder for texts is the best of them all, Sean O'Sullivan's *Folktales of Ireland*. I left it undisturbed in hopes that our collections might be read together, that mine might serve as an appendage to his. They are quite different. All of the stories in Sean O'Sullivan's book were recorded between 1930 and 1948 by trained collectors of folklore. This book gathers stories from the long stretch of Irish folktale writing, from 1825 to the present, and its authors include the people I have introduced to you, novelists and poets and playwrights, writers of sketches and travel accounts, professional folklorists. Sean O'Sullivan's stories come from only six of Ireland's thirty-two counties, none from Northern Ireland. Well over half come from Galway or Kerry, and Kerry supplies the most. Sean O'Sullivan's collection begins in his own experience. He is a Kerry man. His training and commitment lead him, as I think they should, to focus upon the Irish-speaking West. My collection begins in my experience, which has been in the North, and which has suggested kinds of stories and modes of organization and has led me to emphasize Ireland's dominant English-speaking population. What I believe to be most important for understanding Ireland are not the survivals of ancient tale that abound most beautifully in the rocky West, but the tales of all sorts through which the people of Ireland present to themselves that which is of enduring significance.

Let me tell you just what I have done to prepare the tales for you. I maintained my professional dedication to exact transcription unless it ran athwart the obligations I owe to the tales and their tellers. They have the right to communicate. So, without adding a word or shifting any out of order, I edited the opening sentences of a few of the tales that I lifted out of long runs of prose. Then, to bring the stories I found in print a little closer to those I heard, I broke some long paragraphs into shorter ones. In addition, I regularized punctuation and spelling. That sounds easy, but it was not. Writers have done wild things with spelling to capture the English spoken in Ireland. In their own place and day, they might have been successful, but their efforts have erected barriers between the storyteller and the reader and dragged their tales toward oblivion, so, even in texts of my own, I have shifted spelling toward standard literary usage. The distinctive textures of the Irish dialects of English remain in syntax and word choice. Mere spelling should not stand between you and the people who spoke the stories. Not all of the tales came with titles, so I invented some of them, a small matter because it is my experience that most folktales, unlike folksongs, do not exist in the tradition with native titles. After the title for each tale you will find a little information, first the name of a teller and a county, then the name of a writer and a date. Sometimes these few facts eluded me—a sad commentary on past practice—and sometimes I guessed a bit, but I wished to make the big story of the Irish folktale and its subplots clearer by setting each story in place and time. Still more, I wished the repetition of names to remind you that these stories do not come to us from some mystical agency called tradition. We owe them to the collaborative efforts of real people. I held my editing to a minimum to honor both the storyteller and the writer, but every change I made came because my first responsibility is to the storyteller.

It is the storyteller's culture I wish you to enter. To that end I clumped the texts into chapters, but the chapters do not follow scholastic convention. Academic categories serve academic needs, and they have tended to obscure whole classes of traditional narration. They rise from the values of scholars, but the values I wish you to understand are those of the tellers of tale, men like Hugh Nolan, women like Ellen Cutler, so my chapters represent neither old nor new schemes of classification. They are but hints to ease your entry into the Irish folk culture. Here is the course I recommend for your journey:

THE OLD STORY

Three texts review the Introduction and form a prelude to the collection. Each represents one of the classes of tale that have most engaged Irish collectors: fairy legends, Fenian tales, *Märchen*. And in sequence they teach of the progress in the recording of stories, from T. Crofton Croker's sketch of

1825, to Patrick Kennedy's mid-nineteenth-century attempt to write down a story as he heard it, to Douglas Hyde's exact translation of a tale taken down verbatim and published in the first truly modern Irish folktale collection, *Beside the Fire* of 1890.

FAITH

At the dawn of human time, in the first mythic moment, the saints arrive and put the finishing touches on the Irish land, planting it with proof of God's existence. They take control of nature, vanquish the Druids, convert the old warriors, and charge the people of the future to obey God's law of love. Some do.

WIT

Intelligence balances power. Inbuilt wit enables the lawyer to win his case against Satan, the outlaw to escape the authorities, and the peasant to outfox the outlaw. The tenant of story is the master of the landlord. The victory of the humbler brother proves that poverty and weakness tell nothing of wisdom or courage. Even the toughest enemy—boredom—falls before the person who can command the language to yield poetry, who can conquer pain in comic hyperbole.

MYSTERY

This world and the other occasionally veer near collision. The witnesses speak sincerely. They have heard death announced in the earth and felt the ghost's weight and seen the wizened changelings the fairies leave. It seems impossible, but if there are no ghosts, is there no immortal soul, no life after death? Fairies are the angels who fell with Lucifer after defeat at the War of Heaven. They seem, like cats, to have constructed an alternative social order in our midst. If fairies do not exist, then what of angels, what of Heaven? And what about people who foretell the future and cure ills with charms? The shape of reality remains at question, so serious investigators adhere to strict rules of evidence and argue earnestly over the facts, while sly people step into the space between terror and amusement to contrive little fictions.

HISTORY

The endless Irish chronicle of war, of invasion and resistance, expands and grows with detail during the long era of difficulty that begins with defeat

at Kinsale in 1601, that intensifies during the seventeenth-century campaigns of Oliver Cromwell and William of Orange, that sinks with the failure of the Rising of 1798, and ends in the terrible Famine of 1846. This period of pain displays Irish courage and Irish error, and it teaches that in the worst of times God protects those who struggle to endure.

FIRESIDE TALES

Away from the serious mysteries of the world, storytellers have constructed an enchanted realm in which the heroes of a time before history wage beautiful, uproarious war and little children seek maturity. Child after child abandons the comforts of home and takes the strange road, learning to form proper alliances and act with courage in order to enter through marriage a new state of being. Now mature, they are left with their faith, which bids them to endure, and with their wit, out of which they learn to turn fear into laughter and life into a story.

These chapters are but a beginning. The stories I have set within them will disrupt and eradicate their boundaries. I do not want to slice tales up and box them apart. Instead, I want the tales to grope toward unity, so you will find tales that transform other tales, and tales that root up generic distinctions, and tales that interfere with each other, interpenetrating to raise the themes that hold power in the traditional consciousness and that have been molded into artful order by centuries of wise and brave Irish people.

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