
Irish Gothic 1-3

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Irish Gothic 1

O'Connell Street. We pay the fare
to board the famous coach
with its orange and blue livery.
The first task is to escape the castle.
Then the road leads north
as the osprey flies, the highway empty,
dawn far off. We skip towns
and villages, and glide inconspicuous
into the highlands. Scots pine
and Sitka spruce lower
and obscure road-signs and the moon.

*

An amateur historian in the seat behind
tries to engage us in the exact glen
where Redmond and his gang would ride
to extract tolls from villagers,
dodge soldiers and the tory hunter,
hover blurred in bracken, watch the road,
lie down on the cold ground
with earthworms and the devil's coach-horse
— somewhere around here, it is said.

*

The passengers scroll or snore.
Chair jacked all the way back,
one swoons in a vision

of a silk-curtained four-poster,
reins jangling from the yard,
a tattoo of hooves across the ceiling,
the invention of the flintlock pistol.
Onward. Spires, bells: we go like the clappers.

*

A PhD student from Kolkata
returning from a conference at Trinity
can't sleep. He checks his rucksack:
passport, visa.
He skimmed across the border the other way
two days ago, scot-free
but still, he's thinking of the coach waylaid
on some high and desolate pass,
the doors exhaling, the others barely waking
as the bad men pace the aisle.

Irish Gothic 2

These letters were discovered in a fragmentary state
inside a crate of marbles sent from Livorno to Cork.

*My dear friend if my name still awakens some memory
we were companions at the drawing school on George's Lane*

*remember the figure class in which Poulter swallowed a black chalk
or the competition to copy the small bust of Cicero*

*your piece won the two guinea premium your eye was the best
it is my sincere hope that your talents have not*

The Academy in Dublin annually vomits forth an immense pictorial fry
who fall short of their expected attainments.

*sent to Rome to study the Italian masters
sent to London but did not continue long*

*lived in a cave in the Abruzzi and fed upon the flesh of goats
living in the Palazzo Zuccari where the English and many of our nation choose to stay.*

They are unscrupulously imitative
in style, and unqualified for either Fame or Patronage.

*In Rome the marketplace of pictures and sculptures
the quadrari lay the landscapes on the pavement without frames*

*dealers and gentlemen pass by and appraise each view
wind-whipped storm clouds oak and olive tresses maids captured by brigands*

*the style commonly called 'egg and spinach'
I sold half a dozen unsigned to the Earl of*

Their talents are immature
and their lives replete with disappointments and sorrow.

*My long assistance in the studio of the eminent
I add the figures to my master's landscapes*

*his genius the immense mountains and vaunting skies
mine the detail rider farmhand pedlar thief*

*from his attic thick with fumes
I soar above the dusty campagna like the ossifrage*

*that migrates from Egypt to the Alps watching the slopes
for carrion for lambs strayed from the flock*

Any reader with information relating to these correspondents is urged to write privately.

Irish Gothic 3

A bare field; dawn light; prevailing wind.
Enter architects with pins and strings,
bearing the banner of their floor plans.
They pace out lengths of ground.

Spotlight on Earl-Bishop Hervey, stage left
at his writing-desk.

Hervey: My Irish house is building.

Sounds of hammering.
Black and white tiles dance
their steps across the grass,
bricks throng to form the gallery walls.

Enter Placido Columbani, with trowel
and bucket. He applies stucco
to the stone, fashions each intricate frieze.
They dry. Sound of the wind.

Columbani: His paintings have arrived.

Four carts pull up loaded with hay.
Men unpack, unbind and hang
the Raphaels and Titians
along the sweep of wall.
A cameo from Hervey:
he shifts one painting slightly upwards and left,
then flits offstage.

Columbani: The maestro at work!

Enter Lady Hervey, who paces up and down,
watches for high tide through the windows,
sends a servant to Castlerock for letters.
One has come from Turin.

Lady Hervey (reading the letter):
Across the Alps already? How quickly he rides.

Harp music, voices raised in song,
wine-corks discharging, horses' hooves.
Enter the Volunteers, marching in formation,
with silver tea-kettles and picnic hampers.

The Volunteers: Up Hervey!

The bog outside flowers with green foliage.
Enter Arthur Young, with clipboard.

Young: 200,000 trees planted,
60 acres of land drained
by the medium of two hundred spades.

Enter Hervey. He admires the finish
on the view, gives credit to the agent
and landscape designer,
hands out souvenirs from Rome:
tiny pewter fountains and obelisks.
He apologises that he has not brought enough for everyone.

Hervey: I cannot breathe in small rooms.

Exit Hervey. Darkness falls,
with the plumes of flour cast by the maid
on the tiled gallery floor.

Joe Lines is a poet and critic. He studied for a PhD in English at Queen's University, Belfast. He is the author of *The Rogue Narrative and Irish Fiction, 1660-1790* (Syracuse University Press, 2021). His articles have been published in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, and *Romantic Textualities*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Ambit*, *The Tangerine*, *Wasafiri*, *Cyphers*, *The Stinging Fly*, and in a pamphlet from The Lifeboat Press titled *Plot*. He currently lives in Turkey, where he teaches at Bilkent University.

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