

Grá, Dhraiocht ná Cairdeas©

By Nicola Ison for Gylden Fellowship, March 2022

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Grá, Dhraiocht ná Cairdeas: foreword

The title here is Irish Gaelic for love, enchantment and friendship and is a paraphrase of the traditional inscription on a claddagh ring. The enchantment could be magick, but it's a special type of magick – the word refers to the glamours or illusions cast by the sidhe, the Irish fae.

And that is what poetry is – the combination of words and rhythm can produce a sense of enchantment for some, covering the whole gamut of human emotions, namely sadness, grief, happiness and inspiration. Here, such feelings are put with love and friendship, to create the sense of dhraiocht. But not all of these poems are sad or reflective, because the dance of words can lead to glee too. Some of these verses have a lighter tone and play on words for humour.

The humour comes when I'm at a loose end. Or, as I remarked to a friend, the poems help me to write out strong feelings – some find solace in painting, music or sculpture. I write out my emotions in poems and that helps, at least for a while. This anthology was collated at a time of war in Europe, although the poems were written over many years. At a time of strife, national anxieties, death and anger, perhaps we all need love, enchantment and friendship.

Many blessings

Nicola Ison



Elephant in the Sky

To sleep, perchance to dream,
A fine thought for literary souls.
But what when dreams persist,
Beyond waking and into the sunshine?
Can the images truly fade or,
Do they run alongside our lives,
Like hare and greyhounds on a track.
Take pain as your example –
Sleep offers but a brief respite.
The pain continues into each day
And dreaming awake is little succour.
Patterns in clouds and small pleasures,
In food, flowers or music,
Cannot really combat the pain inside.
Yet some hope exists in truth –
With the elephant in the sky, and
The unexpected tenderness of friends.

Journey of Life

As I look back from the railway carriage
At all the passing station platforms,

I see all the flowers in their pots —
Bright splashes of colour in an instant.

The people waiting show bright hues too
And are just as transient to my sight and life.

As I look back on this incarnation,
And reflect on its brief passing,

So, I see that the memories of people,
Both known and remembered,

Are also bright splashes of colour —
Locked in an instant in my diary of life.

We are many things, perhaps,
But you, my friend, were more than that.

You were a fleeting sparkle in my life -
Ever a memory to be revisited, but now passed by.

Summer Night

Full moon rising in a clear sky,
No clouds; just warm still air
And a breath of wind – perfect night
To give thanks and worship to the Goddess.

This is your time to give praise,
To gambol skyclad through trees and grass,
To lift your voice in joyful celebration,
To show your face and flesh without shame.

Stand in front of your mirror
And discard all your clothes;
Daylight props fall – there are no masks here:
The Goddess will see your naked beauty.

Go into the night for your esbat,
This is the solitary's path, as ever was –
As above, so below, so mote it be:
O Wolf – your time has come.

Locked-In Syndrome

Hope springs eternal, so it's said,
Though dreams are such fleeting idylls –
And every half-full glass can drop to the floor,
Smashed to a hundred glittering shards.

The pieces shimmer wickedly below;
I try to reconstruct the whole
And only succeed in cutting my hands,
Drops of blood on adamantine surfaces.

So it is with feelings and emotions,
I think, I dream and I live in hope.
The glass still slips from my grasp,
Only to become a field of sharp edges.

This is not cubed glass, you know,
This is cutting edge stuff,
My feelings lie in pieces on the floor:
Drops of heart-blood on cold stone.

What to do? I cannot remake them –
But I can revisit the memory of hope.
So I remember the dreams and wishes,
Locked away forever in my vault of glass.

Reverie

Why is the sky blue?
A chemical element in the atmosphere,
That reacts with solar rays,
Or a pigment of the Creator's fancy?

Heavy rain last night and,
Sultry air now that promises more.
Perhaps a storm with lightning or
Thunderous rumbles in the distance.

Easy to explain, I muse, either old or new;
If new, then it's all about air pressure and
Temperature, but the old is more dramatic:
A storm-eagle with thunder in its wings.

And you arrive, as ever, in my thoughts,
Magickal and full of compassion forever.
Many sights and sounds invade my mind,
But you are a constant, always there.

Why do you stay in my dreams?
You are the enemy of rational thought,
Yet in a world of magick and myths,
You defeat blue skies and the meaning of storms.



Four O'Clock Shadow

Four o'clock in the morning,
Listening to the rain,
They said it would rain earlier,
But here it comes again.
Not sleeping now, just thinking,
About so many things:
Health and friends and family stuff -
Modern cabbages and kings.
And yet and yet a shadow falls
Across my flow of thought.
I cannot see what it is,
Nor how it can be fought.
All the areas of my life,
I review in some detail,
But this shadow is elusive:
Only the faintest, taunting wail.
Four o'clock in the morning,
Hoping to return to sleep,
The shadow has gone for now -
Buried in my memory deep.

A Squiggly Line

So, here we see the human heart –
A patchwork map of deepest feelings,
Separated by fences and frontiers,
Distinct checkpoints in a maze of emotions.
Over there is the region of hatred,
Coloured deepest ebon on the map and,
Sharply, clearly divided from its neighbour:
The hills and valleys of dislike and distaste.
Closer still is the whitest space –
The desert region of indifference,
Blank and featureless throughout,
With no distinguishing landmarks.

But before us now is the county of love:
Those who care for each other
And who are handfast in this life,
Committed and passionate forever.
Alongside is the place of friendship,
People who care about each other
And who are willing to help or counsel,
This is where loyalty and truth flourish.
Where are the borders of love and friendship?
When do friends become closer than that?
Maps cannot help with blurred feelings –
The border is just a squiggly line.

Painting the Wall

Time for redecoration,
Pull wallpaper strips away,
Leaving ugly remnants behind,
For the scraper to come and flay.

Or, take out the primer and brushes -
Another coat to mask the old hues,
New colours and jazzed-up patterns,
Replace worn-out or tired views.

What happens to old paint and paper?
In truth, has it really left?
Does the room retain the memory
Of past raiment, now it's bereft?

So, it is with passions or feelings,
We hide them with layers of gloss,
Or wallpaper over with brand-new lusts,
But walls keep the trace of past loss.

Old scars remain under new finery,
Because they never really heal –
Old scars, they stay on hearts and minds,
For redecorations to reveal.



A Lighter Note (1): A Cut Finger

The umbrella attacked me,
Truly it has,
Biting and clawing,
Leaving me with a gash.

Oh, come on now Nick,
It's only a cut,
Small wound on the finger,
But – there's always a but.

The cut needs a plaster,
To stop all the dirt,
Going into the wound,
And making it worse.

The plaster is awkward,
So, all through the day,
For reading and writing,
It gets in my way.

The work it takes longer,
And I am not jolly,
The jobs are delayed,
It's the fault of the broolly!

A Lighter Note (2): Herbal Teas

Now I'm feeling ill at ease,
I guess it's time for herbal teas,
Perhaps some mango and strawberries,
I could drink it with some cheese.

My tiredness goes from head to knees,
I know, let's have some cranberries,
Or rejuvenate with some nettle,
Such a tea will restore my mettle.

Oh no, the bag's split and the lees,
Of elderflower and raspberries,
Spread all over the base of my cup –
That can't be a pick-me-up.

Maybe it's best to try a stint,
Of hot and concentrated peppermint,
My skin's gone green – what fell disease
Has come from all these herbal teas?

Reflections on Life

Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who's the fairest of them all?
Or fattest or oldest maybe, I think –
I'm as fair as the bathroom sink.

I stand and stare at mirror-Nick,
Then vanish completely – a magic trick,
You've guessed it – I just stepped sideways,
Totally and completely from the mirror's gaze.

Back again now, to see mirror-Nick's face,
What might happen if we changed our place?
If I moved up and then went through,
To look outside with the mirror's view.

There'd still be us two – light and dark,
One lump of clay without life's spark,
And quicksilver Nick behind the glass wall,
A reflection with mind and spirit and all.

Thinking of mirrors and what I can see,
Is it really the truth or just vanity?
And when I go, leaving this place –
Does the mirror stay here with some of my trace?

Plymouth Morning

Sunday morning and the crowds gather,
Anxiously waiting outside the church doors.
It's not quite time for the service,
People fidget or play on their phones.
And then the doors open wide:
It's 10 o'clock and the liturgy starts.
The mall's open for business and,
The worship of Mammon begins in earnest.
People rush to their altars of choice –
Primark, HMV, River Island, Game,
M&S, New Look and Waterstones.
In between the duration of worship,
Priests from Starbucks, Costa and Krispy Kreme,
Give succour to the faithful.
Outside, the sun shines and I stand,
Listening to the seagulls and watch, entranced,
As a jewelled green dragonfly dances above:
I spend no money but am enriched.

A Lighter Note (3): Glyphs

Some time ago, you read my pleas
About the illness from herbal teas.
Now there's worse – a dread condition
Afflicts my eyes for my optician.

I can't see straight nor read online,
My mind must be in slow decline.
I look at emails and small faces,
Proliferate at unexpected places.

Emoticons, I think they're called,
Used as words – I feel appalled.
Is that a smile or not, I think?
Perhaps a grimace or a wink.

Guessing words is another strain,
That taxes my poor, stressy brain.
I read the mail and texts each day,
But all the vowels have gone away.

Hve I gne mad or just the txt,
Who knows what will be the nxt?
No commas, vowels or consonants,
Mean pictograms are common tense!

Spring Starlight

Clear cold night with a waxing moon above,
Distant stars twinkle their welcomes,
Small sparkles for those who can see,
Little lanterns to guide the lost traveller.
Recollection of another spring evening,
When all hope had disappeared,
And the only route left was that of the dark,
No lights then and certainly no twinkles.

Looking back now, I remain in awe,
Of the shining star who lit my way,
Dispelled the darkness with blazing light,
And showed me the path back to the day.
As we come around to the springtime,
I wait for the stars to appear on clear nights,
And for that single sparkle to blaze again,
Showing its radiance for all who can see.

Lost and Found

As a peaceful butterfly,
Alights on a gaudy flower,
So, a gentle kindness,
Soothes a wounded heart.
Stress, grief and daily strain,
Torture a person's soul,
Leading to a dark crossroads,
Whither should one go?

One path offers a clear route out,
'Tis the cup of hemlock route
While another loops and whirls,
Leading back to the starting point.
All is fog and no straight path,
Until unexpected hope appears,
A sparkly lifeline is at hand,
To guide the lost soul back home.

The False Face Hides

"Good morning, how are you?"
"Fine? That's good – so am I",
Sometimes and otherwise not, but my mask
Covers both the heart and the face: endlessly.
Pretending for friends, for parents and forever,
Donning the masks to suit others' perceptions –
The diligent worker or the good team member,
And are you caught in that trap?

Selecting the best mask or the right prop,
Dressing up day after day or year after year.
As we move from youth to maturity,
Do we drop the masks or just buy more?
Here is a truth – masks are greedy,
Look hard: the masks eat their wearers,
Leaving nothing behind – just a void
And a shade of what used to be.

For some, life is the full costume and mask
To hide truth and to fit in with all.
Here, the worst sin is to lose your mask,
To stop dressing-up and proclaim your truth.
Mirrors deceive and befriend the mask
What you see is what you get – right?
Look hard at your reflection, as I try to do,
Look and find the inner you.

Prismatic Illusions

A glass triangle sits uneasily in the light,
Maybe table ornament or, perhaps,
Glittering paperweight of sunbeams.
Light refracts in prisms –
Coming in from one space and,
Leaving at an angle to other space.
Is this us or, rather, our hearts?
We ask, judge and evaluate,
Other people and their thoughts,
Through the prisms of our own values,
And distorted experiences.
Do we judge on true memories or,
Reflections of our realities?
And, do we substitute in the prisms,
Refractions of egos and feelings?
Previous sympathy or compassion,
May refract as dislike or resentment –
Loss of love in our own dark prisms.
Conditioning and awareness jostle alike,
Should we choose to stay in the past,
Or rejoice in the memory of sunbeams?

On Feeling Emotional

One of my closest friends,
Admits to feeling emotional.
I'm not surprised, due to our demons –
Different for each of us.
Where once was Mammon or Beelzebub,
Now we have stress, fatigue and anger
Or, even sadness or regret.
We, little band of empaths and the like,
Can sense these emotions and try to help.
Sometimes, no better than a listening ear,
Or the ready hand of friendship.
Experience says that we can help a little,
Not problem-solving, but sharing feelings.
I can support my friend in need –
Just to talk over tea and biscuits.
And what is there to say in the end?
What can banish the demons for someone –
I say a loving friendship is like a shield,
Strong enough to protect against any demons.

Rose Petals

I sip my rose petal tea and let my mind drift,
On a calming wave of serenity.
The memories flood back from earlier in the year,
When all was confusion and darkness.
Panic and bewilderment fought a constant battle,
With loneliness, pain and despair.
And then, like a colourful springtime flower,
Help arrived in the form of kindness and concern.
I remember sunny meetings in a country churchyard,
As companions, we talked and gazed upon peace –
Lambs in the field, scented plants and diet coke.
All around us, the headstones showed another peace,
But you, my friend, stopped me from joining them,
Far too early, now I reflect with my tea.
And, perhaps, I should share this with you alone –
It needs repeating, because you don't really believe.
Your spirit is so kind and you have an inner beauty,
That shines out like a radiance for all to see.
As I gaze idly on autumnal colours in the garden,
I feel I should have had a photo or two of that,
Peaceful country churchyard and of you too.
But my memories are clear and comfort me,
When the dark times appear now and then.
Occasionally, I say online that I'm thinking of you,
Sending blessings or healing for you, but really,
It's a peaceful country churchyard that has a place,
In my soul and, always, you join me there too.

Vole

Scuttering and skittering in the weeds,
Through plants, behind sheds and in the reeds.
Life's hard with gardeners digging our habitats,
Or owls, weasels, foxes and terrible cats.
Especially those horrid cats with great big claws,
And long, long teeth or teasing, cruel paws.
I try to escape, but two cats are too much,
Running this way and that, but the felines are such
Good hunters, you know and they just want to play,
But scratching and biting is the end of my way.
And now, I'm cornered and can't get away,
But listen...who's this – someone to save the day?
They put down an old sheet so I can hide below,
And they chase off the cats – I'm safe, I know.
My saviour has acted through **LOVE** just for me,
And vole rearranged spells the same, happily.

Evening Reflections

Last coffee of the day and a piece of cake,
Allow a little time for reflections,
Looking back at the day just gone and,
Noting memories in a journal.

Good idea, that gratitude journal –
Not a diary, but a hybrid mixture of,
Feelings that show the goodness or kindness,
Of people and the wonder of Nature.

Not my idea, this journal, but the,
Suggestion of a dear friend,
Some four years ago after her empathy,
Stopped me from falling into an abyss.

That memory reminds me to send a text,
Wishing her goodnight and blessings.
I do this every night, with a small healing charm;
If I don't say goodnight to that person I love,
It shows that I don't care anymore –
Never going to happen is my mantra,
As I glance at a photo of the two of us,
That sits in my study.

Soft café jazz on the headphones,
Helps the reflections to drift.
Yesterday was a day for tribal laughter,
Amid the company of children.

Tomorrow is a day for bustling errands,
But now is a moment of peace and magick,
Memories of loving companions and,
Looking forward to the future,
For the first time in many moons.

