

Freedom: Rob Simes

I had a week off work. They had allowed it. I think they felt they had no choice, given the circumstances. Initially I had decided to go to the States, given the time of year, to New York, and then into the hinterland for a few nights either side of Halloween.

But I hesitated.

I was not entirely sure why, recent events, travelling alone?

One night, late, on a walk near home, the wind violent through the gums, Joyce and Yeats came to mind, and, particularly, 'The Second Coming' prowled on the edges of things. And I decided, right there, that it would be Dublin for a day, and then Trim. It would be the subtle substance of Samhain, not the saccharine jump scares of Sleepy Hollow.

On the long flight over, reading the in-flight glossy, some facts gathered, 'pronounced sah-win,' 'it marked summer's end, and so was a time when a good harvest would allow food for celebration,' 'the old year is coming to an end, it is dying, and the veil between the spirit world and the material world is so very thin,' 'so the dead walk, the gods are visible,' 'people can have strange encounters, in fact, it is to be expected,' and 'you want to commune with the dead, because the dead know things that the living do not.'

And this was, I hoped, fact, and it tugged at my heart.

The day in Dublin was special, but I wanted more.

I caught the bus, from Dublin to Trim, reading the copy of Yeats' *Fairy and Folk Tales* that I had bought from Hodges Figgis.

And, once there, I settled into the hotel, had a shower, grabbed the book, and went for a walk.

The sun had been out, when I started, the sensual and demanding green, everywhere.

But, as I wandered, and read, the Boyne gentle, whispered, the clouds came in, low, and grey. I had followed the river a long way. I was tired, and rested beneath an oak, its rough and ancient bark pleasant against my back.

And I drifted.

And, I think, I dozed.

And I saw a pack of wolves, long tongues, lolling between fierce teeth, and, unsurprisingly, my heart raced. The castle was behind them. The clouds were low, the sun still piercing them, here and there.

And, most of all, I noticed their eyes, bright with knowing, and they loped right past my tree.

But one peeled off from the rest, and as he came close, he changed. Before me, was a man, strong, hairy, wild, and he sat in front of me, quietly.

And he waited, and everything else was forgotten.

And, in time, I cried, and great salty tears streamed down my face. And, he cried too.