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Live  
encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH  
AUGUST 2022

JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN  
*A Tribute*

BACKGROUND COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Water lily, Luang Prabang, Laos. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Live Encounters is a not-for-profit free online magazine that was founded in 2009 in Bali, Indonesia. It showcases some of the best writing from around the world. Poets, writers, academics, civil & human/animal rights activists, academics, environmentalists, social workers, photographers and more have contributed their time and knowledge for the benefit of the readers of:

*Live Encounters Magazine (2010), Live Encounters Poetry & Writing (2016), Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers (2019) and now, Live Encounters Books (August 2020).*

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

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POEMS HA'PENNY EACH

JAMES WALTON, *Review of*

JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN'S ALOYSIUS THE GREAT

*Extract from*

ALEXANDER THE GREAT, A LYRICAL BIOGRAPHY

*by* CHRISTINE O'BRIEN & JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN



## THE WORD AND JOHN

A few months ago, John messaged me on Fb as he wanted to send me a donation. But there was a precondition - I would have to promise to only spend the money on a few 'nice' meals at local restaurants and/or purchase some cigars. I was pleasantly taken aback by John's generosity. Perhaps he sensed that I needed a break from my self-imposed exile in the ether.

He always referred to me as cousin, alluding to my Irish family connections.

There was always a hint of urgency in his approach to his writing, a feverish indulgence that came across in his communications with the magazine.

I never got to read *Alexander the Great*, *The Invisible Enemy* and *Aloysius the Great*. However, he mailed me a pdf of *Alexander the Great, A Lyrical Biography* co-authored with his daughter, Christine.

The excerpts he shared with the readers gave me a glimpse of his fine intellectual mind meandering purposefully through a labyrinth of narration, displaying a keen sense of wit and the absurd juxtapositioned in a living breathing Ulyssean world that ran parallel to Joyce's epic. Cleverly embedded in the account was his own stamp of scholarly authority intrinsically woven into the meanderings of an alcoholic protagonist.

Perhaps this introduction to *Aloysius*, which he shared in *Live Encounters*, presents the readers with a bird's eye view of his epic:

*Aloysius the Great is a seriocomic tale of an alcoholic professor who becomes resident director of an American study abroad program in England during the 1960s and finds himself on a runaway roller coaster of rebellious students, drugs, sex, liquor, and academic politics.*

*This picaresque novel is a treasure trove for admirers of James Joyce. Its chapters parallel episodes in Joyce's Ulysses. Many of its characters come from Ulysses and/or individuals significant in Joyce's life. Words and phrases from Ulysses are sprinkled harmoniously throughout the text and Joyce aficionados are invited to detect vestiges of the master in the excerpt that follows...*

One has often wondered where poets go after they die. Is there a paradise where they can continue procrastinating over verb and adverb, or create a sentence of life and then erase it in a blink of an eye, or *just be* in the eternal moment?

I am sure that John is with his mentor, Joyce, discussing over a pint of Guinness in *Tír Tairngire\** the existential dilemmas in an *Ulyssean World*.

We wish John a safe journey onwards into the Light.

*Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om*

\*("land of promise/promised land")



## MY FATHER

My father was one of those people who became far busier after retirement than he had ever been while working. This came as no surprise. What was surprising was that shortly thereafter, he made the bold and rather quixotic declaration that after fifty plus years as a book loving accolade receiving family oriented venerable academician who loves to love and loves to be loved he had decided one day that as far as books were concerned he had finally reached his saturation point, right then and there he knew that was never going to read another book ever again. I didn't believe him of course, so to test his outwardly steely resolve I got him a *Kindle* for Christmas, just to see what he would do. Astonishingly, he gave it back to me, and true to his word, continued to swear off books for the duration of his lifetime. Then it dawned on me. He wasn't reading books anymore because he was having far too much fun actively engaging in a literary wonderland full of invention, experimentation, discovery, shared ideas and exploration and surprise. In other words, the older he got, the more deliberate his actions became and clearer his priorities reflected a shifting but heightened worldview. Possibilities were no longer seen as being as infinite as the universe, because we ourselves are finite and infinity is tempered with intimacy. It was in this chapter of our lives that we were lucky enough to experience some of it together, and forever grateful I will be to my father and so many others who gave so very much of themselves to see this work to completion.

John Maxwell O'Brien



## JOHN O'BRIEN THE GREAT

On behalf of our entire family, I want to thank everyone so much for coming here today as we celebrate the life of my dad, Doctor John M. O'Brien. And don't forget the doctor! Without fail, wherever we went together as I was growing up, someone would take notice and ask my dad... Oh you're a doctor? What kind? He would respond matter-of-factly, "Sorry, I'm not the kind of doctor that helps people" ... Of course, everyone would laugh just as you all did. But the fact of the matter is, while he "only" had a PhD., John O'Brien was a doctor that helped people. Every single day. He made it his life's mission. Whether it was myself, my sisters Christine and Lillian, my mother Dorothy, a dear friend, a new friend or a complete stranger... He treated you the same way, with a piqued interest in what was happening in your life, where you came from, how you got there and what he could do to help you on the rest of your journey.

The turnout here today proves my point and shows just how many people my dad reached from all walks of life, from all corners of the earth and this is precisely what he wanted. A night where we can celebrate his life with family and friends, show our love and appreciation for this giant of a man and have more laughs than cries. So that's exactly what we're going to do!

As you all know... my dad was a man who wore many "hats". Most of them had a big round brim to protect his fair Irish skin from the sun... Or of course his signature beret, which he still refuses to take off!

As for his "other" hats, he was a scholar. A prodigy of sorts who skipped 3 grades, was admitted into Queens College at the ripe old age of 15 and got his PhD. at USC when he was just 24 years old. But of course, just as he always told me "no one is perfect!". He epitomized the absent-minded professor, that was him to a tee! And as his dad, James Aloysius O'Brien, always used to tell him, "Johnny, you've got more degrees than a thermometer, but you can't tie your own shoelaces." Sad but true and something my mom can certainly attest to!

He was an athlete. That's how my dad and I bonded the most was through sports, both playing and watching together for as long as I can remember. And a little-known fact about my dad, well perhaps little known to some... Not only did he get into college at age 15, but he made the basketball team and if you dig deep into the record books, you'll see that he actually has the highest field goal percentage in NCAA history. He got into exactly one game and took exactly one shot. Of course, he made that shot and promptly retired. He always knew how to go out on a high note!

He was an accomplished author, a prolific poet and a witty wordsmith. He published "*Alexander The Great: The Invisible Enemy*" which was a best-selling biography, his novel "*Aloysius The Great*" which was based on a short period of his life when he led a Queens College study-abroad program to Leeds in England back in the 1960's and most recently an epic poem on *Alexander The Great* which he wrote with my sister, Christine. Not to mention countless other works including articles in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, *The New York Times*, *The Times in London* and the list goes on and on!

Above all else, John O'Brien was a teacher. He had such an incredible and decorated 50(!) years at Queens College but that's not even where he did his best work. That was at home, where his kids were lucky enough to be his students and have a front row seat every single day. There may have been too many tests for our taste, but the price of tuition was right! He taught me everything I know... How laughter is so often the best medicine. How important it is to treat people equally, with both kindness and respect. My dad taught me how to be a man. How to be a good man.

One of the last and proudest "hats" he ever wore, as he put it, was to become "a man of the cloth". My father became ordained to preside over my marriage with my now lovely wife, Danielle. Like everything else he did, he not only took the task on, but he knocked it out of the park.

He loved his motto, "*Quidvis Agendum, Nimis Agendum*" which is a Latin phrase that means "anything worth doing is worth overdoing". He embodied that every single day, and especially on this day. He not only played the part perfectly, but he looked the part as well. My wedding day was hands down the best day of my life and to many that might seem like a fairly obvious statement and far from a stretch. But it's not just because I got to marry the love of my life, of course that goes without saying, Danielle! It was also because my dad was right where he's always been, right by my side. He was my best friend, so naturally I wanted him to be my best man but thanks to an assist from my then fiancée, we came up with this even better idea.

The way that he raised myself and my sisters, there wasn't a priest, a pastor, a deacon, a minister, a rabbi or God himself that could hold me more accountable to my wedding vows than he could... Or make my marriage feel more official and validated. He set that kind of example for us every day with my mom, Dorothy. In a nod to my dad, today I'm wearing the tie that he donned when he married us on June 4th, our wedding day.

It's hard to believe that was only a month ago. It feels like yesterday and a lifetime ago all at the same time... But if you're a writer, like my dad so obviously was, the one thing you're always worried about... is the ending. You obsess over it. It consumes you. Is it good enough? Does it do the story and the main character justice? While my dad's last chapter may have been a short one, I think it was some of his best work yet. He still got to write his own ending and no one could have done it better, just ask him! The last few weeks he was surrounded by his family that never left his side and we were able to spend time with him and shower him with all the love, care and appreciation that he deserved, just as he did for us our entire lives. It was peaceful because it was such a rare occasion where there were no regrets on either side. He lived such a rich, fulfilled and rewarding life and we couldn't have possibly asked for a better father, husband and friend.

Still, one of the toughest things that any child ever has to go through in life is watching their father get old. Luckily for me, I never had that problem... My dad was always old! And when you look at all the pictures through the years, I think you'll agree. Not a whole lot has changed! And that makes perfect sense because, to me, my dad was one of the Greek Gods that he studied nearly his entire life. Someone to look up to and emulate. An ageless wonder with mythical knowledge and power. A Greek God is immortal... Their legacy will always live on and John's most certainly will, through us and the countless others that he touched.

My dad, who did *so much* for others, did have two final requests that he wanted me to pass along to all of you...

1. And I repeat... He did not want this to be a sad occasion here tonight. He wanted a celebration and a chance for people to reflect fondly on the memories we all shared of him together and to enjoy more than a few laughs. I told him that the man that he was and the life that he led should make that an easy ask for all of us.
2. The second thing, and I warned him that this one might be a bit more challenging... Is that he kindly asks all of you to log on to *Amazon* and write a rave review of his book "*Aloysius The Great*", whether you read it or not!

Despite what he said so many times in jest, my father was the kind of doctor that helped people.

It's right at the top of the list of so many things that made him the greatest man I've ever met and why I'm so damn proud to have the honor of being his son.

He wasn't just my dad. He was my role model. He was my best friend. He was my hero. So please, let's hear it for my father... John O'Brien The Great!

Terry McDonagh is a much loved Irish Poet and Founding Contributor to Live Encounters (2010). <http://www.terry-mcdonagh.com/>



Rathmines Public Library, Dublin.

## LIFE WILL HAVE ITS WAY...

...and some things are not meant to be. I was looking forward to meeting John O'Brien in Dublin but, sadly, he has left us. I never met him in person, but the little contact we had apportioned me the liberty of feeling I'd could have spent a vibrant evening in his company. There would have been some Guinness to keep us delighting in word and nonsense – maybe not. We might even have broken into bits of song – who knows? A man who could smell satire and write dialogue in such detail must have had a wonderful sense of humour.

As I said, I only got to know John him on Facebook; in Live Encounters and between the pages of his brilliant novel written with the keen eye of a dramatist. The hero is not without his flaws – they are not tragic or life-threatening. He is one of us. *Aloysius the Great* is a page turner and wonderful read...and I have a signed copy! I'm smiling.

Joyce and Ulysses come to life again in Gogarty and Mountjoy but we don't have to struggle – we are invited to float along in a stream of boozy, semi college chaos. John O'Brien's academic background and his obvious love of Joyce irreverence and comedy peep out at us from between every line.

John appeared to me to be a larger than life personality full of wit, humour, irony and flair. He had a very sensitive, caring and generous side too. He asked me for a copy of my poetry collection, *Lady Cassie Peregrina* and, without being asked, he came up with a wonderful review. I am and will remain indebted to him.

It suffices to say, he enriched my life and the lives of others through his work and his obvious love of life. I wish I could have met him. May he rest in peace.

Lynda Tavakoli is a writer and poet from Northern Ireland whose work has been widely published in Ireland, the UK and the Middle East.  
<https://www.amazon.com/Boiling-Point-Jam-Lynda-Tavakoli/dp/1851322493>



## REVIEW BY JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN

Soon after my debut poetry collection was published, John surprised me by writing a totally unexpected and beautiful review. I was very touched by his kindness as I hadn't actually requested one from him and he simply wrote it as an honest observation of the poems that were included. I have returned to what he said and chosen, as my tribute to him, one of the poems he selected for specific mention. Written about my own father, it is entitled 'Words' and seems fitting because John himself was a great lover of them, as we know. I think he would approve.

### The review

*What a glittering array of poems this book offers for a debut collection. There's raw honesty and a palpable strain of acute authenticity running through it that isn't swallowed up by a dense forest of strained similes and muscular metaphors. Lynda Tavakoli's linguistic sensibility and powers of observation are portable; they carry us across the Irish countryside to the mid-east and back, always on the lookout for kindred souls, pathos, singular moments, humanity in its multiple guises.*

*Some of Tavakoli's own words hint at where her linguistic versatility originated and what you're in store for in this slim, robust volume: "At tea times my father consumed words...each one explored with tenderness of thought and the feathered touch of a big man's fingertips." "...the ticking of a clock, as the past becomes the present and the present loiters somewhere in the past." Shades of Eavan Boland: "They were found together, limbs stretched like starched shirts...Winter had finally seized them." "Your soldiers' voices ricochet, tongue to tongue, bullet words of war, a share of confidences through a century of tortured sleep." "Yet there is peace in the ordinary: the boiling point for jam, the quiet release of a latch, the skirting of his arms about her waist, the hope that love would always be enough."*

*It's not. We need poetry to remind us of it. Poetry like that of Lynda Tavakoli - Brava!  
 "The Boiling Point for Jam" Arlen House (Dublin, 2020)*

## THE BIG FREEZE

They were found together,  
 limbs stretched like starched shirts  
 abandoned on a washing line,  
 fingers, stalacto-stalagmites of frozen touch.  
 Winter had finally seized them,  
 their black crow cloaks no match for the worst  
 whiteout in a hundred years.

In stories they were witches,  
 two sisters hiding their eccentricities  
 in the anonymity of a bog,  
 magic spells and caldrons  
 fodder for tale-tellers around the  
 open fires of my childhood.

But hiding in the pinked dapple  
 of a rogue beech I had watched them once,  
 their meagre chatter bouncing off each other  
 like the sonar of a bat, their faces soft with kindnesses  
 as one by one they picked words from the earth  
 and rested them upon the other's mouth  
 like a coming melt of snow.



## A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

John wrote to me on Messenger via Facebook, introducing himself, on 23 May 2019. I replied, accepting his friend request. It was not until January of this year that he replied. It had not registered at the time. We did not know each other. I forgot his message. It never occurred to me then that he may have been unwell. When he resumed contact, he posted me a copy of his novel, *Aloysius the Great*, in January 2022. By the time it arrived, John had emailed me detailed notes about his book relating to the references and allusions. I could see immediately what a scholar he was. The book arrived in mid-January, by the end of the month *Aloysius* had entered my life.

The humour, references and learning, not to mention the inventiveness, make *Aloysius* a delightful read. It had been ages since I laughed out loud while reading a novel. John's style, wit, irony, turn of phrase, images and representation of the academic world along with quotes from books (not just *Ulysses*) was wonderfully refreshing. The references enhanced my joy of reading. But, the beauty of the novel is that the story works just as well without the reader getting all the references. This is what I wrote about his novel, a wonderfully refreshing celebration of life, on Amazon:

"*Aloysius the Great* is a thoroughly good read. It is not every day that one has the opportunity to laugh out loud while reading a novel. John's style, humour, wit, irony, turn of phrase, images and representation of the academic world along with quotes from books (not just Joyce's *Ulysses*) is a wonderfully refreshing celebration of life. The Joycean references, connections and allusions are virtually inconspicuous, almost by design. However, they enhance the read, especially for those who can access it. But the story works just as well without the reader getting all the references. I recommend the novel highly. *Aloysius* is great company – he is intelligent, well-read, full of fun, and treats us to a good time."

It was a gift I will treasure. When I wrote this to John, his reply was not just incredibly moving, but reveals the kind of man he was. He wrote: 'The real gift is your friendship. It's an honor to draw close to such a warm human being.' He was such a warm and generous person, I would have liked to have met him. Later, he sent me a copy of his magnum opus, *Alexander: The Great*, which I am reading and remembering the generous soul that was John M. O'Brien. Though our online contact was brief, I knew how immensely devoted he was to his family. My deep condolences to them, how they must miss him. It has been a blessing to have known such a warm and wonderful human being.



Bernadette Gallagher is a poet from Donegal, living in County Cork, Ireland.  
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Anton Floyd born in Cairo, Egypt, a Levantine mix of Irish, Maltese, English and French Lebanese, now lives in West Cork, Ireland. Widely published in Ireland and overseas, a debut collection, *Falling into Place* was published by Revival Press in 2018. A new collection, *Depositions* from Doire Press launched in June 2022. Website [antonfloyd.ie](http://antonfloyd.ie)

On a visit to the US in 2019 John sent me a message: 'If while you're over here at any time you need help in regard to anything, here's my home phone number.....We live in New Milford Connecticut and would be glad to help. My people came from Kildare.....My wife and I are closing in on 42 years of marriage and it gets better every year.'

## LAST DAYS OF JUNE

*i.m. John Maxwell O'Brien*

I didn't know you, we never met  
But our few words across the ether  
Were enough to connect.

What does one say and to whom?  
Today we had rain and sun  
Poppy and rose petals fell to the ground.

I send a message  
And your son  
Turns around.

John and I had an online friendship over a number years. We connected firstly through a mutual interest in matters Hellenic and Joyce. I was able to put him in touch with others here in Ireland who might be able to help with his research and his plans to tour the country once his 'Aloysius the Great' was published. He even sent me a detailed exposition of his references to Ulysses in the first three chapters. When AtG was published we exchanged books. He was very complimentary on the poems in 'Falling into Place'.

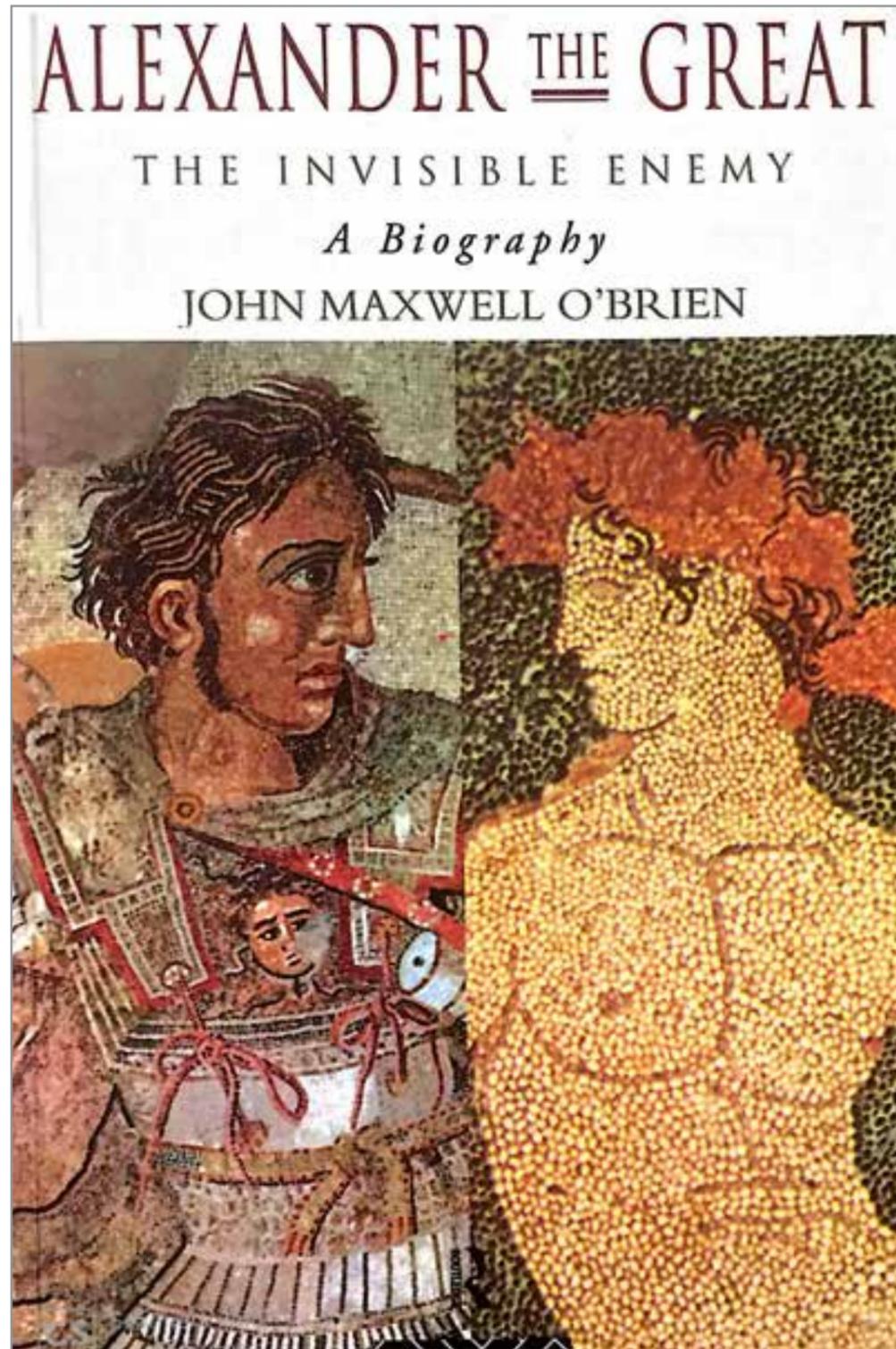
The following is a sample of John's humour when I let him know that the book had arrived and I was about to start reading it:

"Oh! Lock up the liquor closet and send the women to a relative."

We would occasionally exchange poems and we were hoping to host him when he planned to be in Cork promoting 'Aloysius the Great'.

It was a cause of real concern to hear of his illness and I felt his great disappointment when he wrote to say that he had to cancel his Irish trip. Then when news of his death followed so quickly after the concern became shock and deep sorrow. My condolences go to his dear family and his many friends.

Published in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing June 2019



*Aloysius the Great* is a seriocomic tale of an alcoholic professor who becomes resident director of an American study abroad program in England during the 1960s and finds himself on a runaway roller coaster of rebellious students, drugs, sex, liquor, and academic politics. This picaresque novel is a treasure trove for admirers of James Joyce. Its chapters parallel episodes in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Many of its characters come from *Ulysses* and/or individuals significant in Joyce's life. Words and phrases from *Ulysses* are sprinkled harmoniously throughout the text and Joyce aficionados are invited to detect vestiges of the master in the excerpt that follows:

## CHAPTER 1

That posturing hippopotamus couldn't possibly know about Marthe, could he? No. Not Dean Irwin. He's oblivious to anything beyond his own résumé.

Marthe wouldn't breathe a word of it. Or shouldn't. She's the one who did the seducing. Okay—lacing my coffee with gin while still at the college was an error of judgment, but who expects students to be knocking at your office door at ten o'clock at night?

Stop playing the victim, Aloysius. It's unbecoming. If you hadn't been drinking, you would have persuaded her to back off, or at least made a break for it. If she has pointed a finger at you, no one will believe your version of the story. Screwed—that's what you are.

I glance back down at the letter on top of the pile.

*Aloysius Tabeel Gogarty*  
*Assistant Professor*  
*Department of History*  
URGENT

John's best-selling biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian. [https://www.amazon.com/Alexander-Great-Invisible-Enemy-Biography-ebook/dp/B00IEBZHI2/ref=dp\\_kinw\\_strp\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/Alexander-Great-Invisible-Enemy-Biography-ebook/dp/B00IEBZHI2/ref=dp_kinw_strp_1)



I start to unpeel the envelope but stop and turn it back around. No, it's not my absurd name that's troubling me. It's the return address in the upper left-hand corner: Office of the Dean of Faculty. Footsteps approach from the hallway. Beware of prying eyes in the faculty mailroom. Retreat to the sanctuary of your office.

*September 11, 1967*

*Dear Professor Gogarty,*

*A situation has presented itself that demands immediate attention. It is of utmost importance that we meet concerning this matter. Contact Mrs. Delagracia at my office (ext. 1922) to arrange a meeting with me and do so promptly upon receipt of this letter.*

*Francis Irwin  
Dean of Faculty  
Municipal College of the City of New York  
FI/ed*

There's no please, not even a sincerely yours. Maybe civilities are superfluous when it comes to notices of execution. One vulnerable moment and—poof—everything you've worked for goes up in smoke.

*Go ahead. Do it. Pick up the phone. Climb onto the funeral pyre.*

"Hello, it's Aloysius Gogarty from the History Department. I understand the dean has been looking for me . . . that is . . . uh . . . wishes to see me. Yes, I'm over here in Hammersmith Tower and can stop by now if that's all right. Good. See you soon." I walk across campus at a brisk pace but stop dead in my tracks in front of the dean's office, immobilized, gaping at the doorknob.

Take a deep breath. Open the door. Don't slam it behind you.

Elena Delagracia looks up from behind her nameplate and catches me unaware. I take a step back to process what I see. Her red hair moves upward in an irregular curl at the apex of her forehead, just as Alexander the Great's did.

Her eyes are avocado green, but when the light catches her right eye, it turns chestnut brown. Alexander's eyes were said to be like that.

"Might you be Professor Gogarty?" she asks in a high-pitched voice, breaking the spell.

Off on the wrong foot again. Color me hapless when it comes to women.

"I beg your pardon, you remind me of someone. Yes, I might be . . . I mean, I am," I shake my head theatrically, "Aloysius Gogarty."

Her winsome smile puts me at ease for the moment. Elena Delagracia isn't what you expect to see in a Latin American; her hair and ivory skin hint at a Celtic or Germanic influence. She seems amused. Make the most of it.

"May I ask—are you from Spain?"

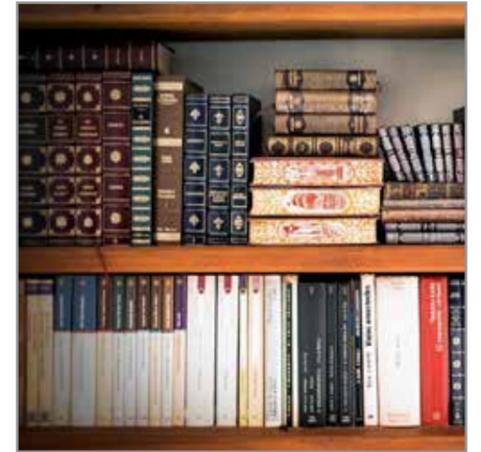
"Actually, Professor Gogarty, I was born in Cuba, but my parents come from Andalusia which, as you know, is in Spain."

The German tribe of Vandals left their name in Andalusia; maybe they're the guilty party. But the Greeks and the Jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe traipsed over that region. So, it's anyone's guess. Didn't the dean's letter say *Mrs. Delagracia*? There's no ring on her finger?

"Simply for reasons of protocol, should I address you as Miss Delagracia or Mrs. Delagracia?"

"Either way," she says, with oracular ambiguity. "You can take a seat if you'd like. Dean Irwin will be with you in just a few minutes."

"Thank you."



I find myself stealing another glance at her. They say my mother's eyes were a different color too. She gave me life, but I killed her in the process. Now it looks like I've killed my career. I must have the Midas touch in reverse. Everything I lay my hands on seems to turn to—

Dean Irwin emerges from a corridor behind Elena's desk and signals for me to follow him. There's no handshake, a sure sign my fate is sealed.

Irwin can't be more than five feet five but must weigh close to two hundred and fifty pounds. I can't resist mimicking his waddle as I follow in his footsteps, but this risky routine comes to an abrupt halt when my shoes sink into a thick crimson carpet.

His office is a large horseshoe-shaped room with intricately carved mahogany bookcases lining its walls. The bookshelves are filled with leather-bound classics arranged chronologically, except for one area, French literature. There, foot-high marble busts of Montaigne and Racine face out into the room, drawing a visitor's attention to the three volumes they frame—Irwin's celebrated tome on the use of the accent circumflex in France during the seventeenth century. In the next life he'll probably focus on the accent aigu.

An antique chandelier hangs over a mahogany chair directly in front of Irwin's larger-than-life desk. He points to the chair and we sit. Irwin's head is silhouetted by the sunlight streaming through a semicircular window behind him, making his round face barely visible against a postcard profile of the Manhattan skyline. A pungent wave of his cologne wafts in my direction, but I restrain myself from retching.

I wonder how he sees me. I'm twenty-seven, five feet nine and a half inches tall, overweight, and undistinguished, except for my auburn hair and small, round black sunglasses. Come to think of it, almost all of my clothes are either black or gray. I'm always seen in my undersized black beret, tilted slightly to the right. It's my Latin Quarter hat, my Hamlet hat.

"Is there a clinical explanation for those opaque glasses of yours? You always seem to be wearing them," Irwin says while reaching for a pencil.

He's been collecting evidence.

"BEB."

"BEB?"

"Yes, benign essential blepharospasm. I contracted it as a child during the war, and it left me photophobic."

"You wear them at night as well?"

"They mitigate the impact of artificial light on the pupils of my eyes."

"Really?" he asks, rolling the pencil back and forth across his desk with the palm of his hand. "Oh yes, of course . . . BEB."

He hasn't the slightest notion of what I'm talking about.

"Professor Gogarty," he lifts the pencil and stares at it, "what were your plans for this year?"

I feel the blood coursing through my neck.

Here's where the hammer descends on me.

"Well, I *had planned* to continue teaching here."

Irwin starts tapping the pencil on his desk. After a glacial pause, he speaks. "Well, if it were up to me, you would *not* be teaching here this year." He squints and sits there squeezing the pencil until its tip breaks from the pressure he's applying.



I flinch, and beads of sweat gather on my forehead. I reach for my handkerchief, fold it in half, and make a wide sweep of my brow. What should I do? Confess and throw myself on the mercy of the court?

“Oh?” is all that escapes from my mouth.

Irwin shifts the phlegm around in his throat and looks at me from behind the pointless pencil he’s holding upright in front of his nose. “How would you like to lecture at a foreign university this year?”

“What the...? Excuse me?”

“Yes.” He smiles.

He *smiled*.

“As you may know, we’re in the process of transforming our study-abroad program into the largest—or I should say— the best example of international education in the world. We now have six centers in Europe and three in Latin America. This year we’re moving into England and Japan, and there’s an opening for you at one of our international centers.”

Sweet Jesus recalled to life. What did he say? Japan?

“I don’t speak Japanese.”

“No, no, no. The UK. England. How would you like to be resident director of the New York Municipal College’s Study-Abroad Program in Great Britain?”

I’ve already learned that the longer an academic title, the less important the position, but it’s a far cry from leaving in disgrace, so I raise my eyebrows to show I’m impressed.

“You’ll be teaching several courses at a host university and serving as a shepherd of sorts for our students. You’d be what the English call their moral tutor.”

“Their *moral* tutor?”

“Why not? There’s nothing that would disqualify you from such a post. Is there?”

“I should hope not,” I say, as convincingly as I can.

He nods in satisfaction. “You may be wondering why all this has arisen at the eleventh hour. The fact of the matter is that, poised as we are to set the UK program in motion, we’ve experienced an unanticipated setback. A Berkeley professor agreed to lead the group, but he’s taken ill—atrial fibrillation, and the poor man is only in his early fifties. His personal physician has advised him to remain in California. We need a younger man, someone who is physically fit and popular with his students.

“I’ve been led to believe you may fit the bill. Now I’m well aware that you are coming up for tenure this year, but there’s no reason that can’t be accomplished *in absentia*. If you provide exemplary leadership abroad it would be of inestimable value to the college and, of course, taken into consideration when you’re evaluated for tenure. Does the position seem attractive to you?”

If I’m denied tenure I’ll lose my job anyway, so it’s out of the frying pan, into the inferno. Is there a choice here? I might as well probe.

“What about my classes?”

“We’re already in the process of making arrangements for adjuncts to cover all of your sections. From what I’ve heard it’ll be difficult for anyone to match your performance in the classroom, but we’ll do the best we can. Don’t worry about us though; we’ll manage. No one is irreplaceable.”

Isn’t *that* comforting? By all means, go right ahead and usurp my life. Uproot and transplant me as it suits you.



"What about my research? I've almost finished the final draft of my book and planned on polishing it during the next few months."

"They polish books in England, don't they? In fact, the English are forever polishing their books. Your manuscript—it's about Charlemagne, isn't it?—should improve by leaps and bounds in such a civilized environment. Besides, the tenure materials are not due at the departmental level until April. There's no reason whatsoever you cannot accomplish all of your objectives abroad. I finished *my magnum opus* in Paris, despite all the seductive distractions there."

Irwin smiles suggestively but declines to elaborate on which seductive distractions in Paris could possibly have come between him and the circumflex.

"And that work, by the way, earned me recognition as a *Chevalier of the Ordre des Palmes Académiques*." His pudgy finger points to a medallion attached to a purple ribbon encased on the wall in a gilded baroque frame.

I purse my lips and nod, as if I've been made privy to an earth-shattering revelation. The truth of the matter is Irwin reminds the entire faculty of this distinction with numbing regularity and is said to wake people up on park benches to let *them* know as well. The consensus is that it was his wife's access to the corridors of power in French society, rather than his immortal broodings over the circumflex that earned him his *Chevalier* medallion. Her family traces its lineage all the way back to Charlemagne.

*Wait a minute.* He thinks I'm writing a book about Charlemagne and is probably concerned I'll say something unsavory about his wife's ancestor.

"It's Alexander, by the way. Not Charlemagne. I'm writing a biography of Alexander the Great."

"*Alexandre le Grand*, eh? Well, I'm glad to hear that. I thought it was Charlemagne. So, Alexander's the one you're making a drunk out of?"

"I prefer to think he did that to himself. I'm simply disclosing what I've discovered in the sources," I say piously. "I'm sorry if you find that disconcerting."

"Not in the least. In fact, I find it quite promising now that I know its Alexander. Properly executed, it could draw favorable attention to the college. Still, it's a trifle old fashioned with the drinking, no? What about drugs? Didn't he use them? That might make your book more engaging and be more in keeping with our times."

"Thanks for the suggestion, but no he didn't use drugs, just wine."

"No beer, either?"

"The ancient Greeks thought of beer as a swinish potation, better left to the barbarian."

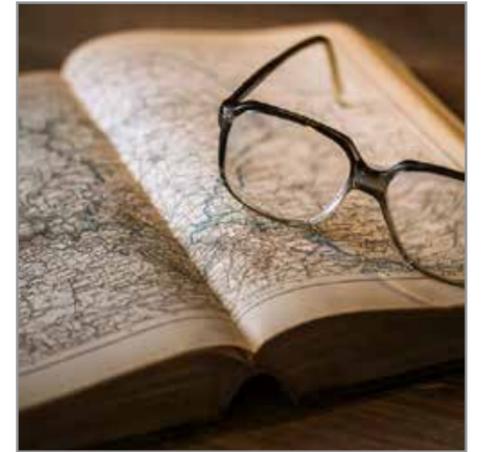
He smiles again. "How French. This isn't going to be a temperance tract inveighing against the fruit of the vine, is it? I occasionally indulge in the grape myself, and you, I've been told, are no teetotaler, correct?"

"God forbid," I blurt out. Then, realizing Irwin's just made a jarring reference to my drinking, quickly add, "I tend to follow Aristotle in seeking balance in all things." Jesus. I sound just as pretentious as *el hipopótamo*. Better change the subject.

"Won't these students require a great deal of attention in England?"

"Minimal. They're young adults, not children. Furthermore, the Berkeley man scrutinized all applications and interviewed each and every candidate. I, of course, had the final say as to whether an applicant was acceptable. Few difficulties should arise.

"Naturally, during the first couple of weeks you'll have to make yourself available to them, but after that they'll be largely on their own. Only our best and brightest students, thirteen in all, have been approved for the program. These young people are looking to absorb a foreign culture, not make a surrogate father of you."



He has an answer for everything.

“They’ll be leaving by boat on the weekend. The English term begins at the end of this month, and our students will spend a few days in London to get acclimated. You will leave early next week by air, in order to establish yourself and coordinate their orientation. First, you’ll go to Yorkshire University to introduce yourself, then to London to greet our students. After a week or so there, you’ll arrange for three of them—all girls I believe—to be transported to Berkshire University. You’ll accompany a mixed group of ten students to Yorkshire University. That’s where you’ll teach. You’ll have a liaison at Yorkshire, but that’s not the case at Berkshire. Here’s the name of the Yorkshire man and how he can be reached.” He leans across the desk as far as his bulbous stomach will permit and hands me a sheet of paper.

It says: “Yorkshire University: Richard Tarleton Mountjoy” above a phone number and a university address. Talk about names. He’s probably one of those portentous prigs the English lionize.

“It will be of utmost importance for you to make a good impression on this man and form an amicable working relationship with him.”

That will be a challenge. We’ll have next to nothing in common. Irwin still hasn’t answered the most important question:

“You don’t think then that this commitment could adversely affect my chances of getting tenure?”

“In my opinion—and I do not, of course, speak for members of the Promotion and Tenure Committee—if your book gets published by a scholarly press, and if you enjoy a successful year abroad, it would be very difficult to deny your tenure.”

So, there’s no hammer, but a Damoclean sword will dangle over my head until the mission is accomplished to his satisfaction. I raise a skeptical eyebrow. “How many students applied for the program?”

He hesitates. “Thirteen. But you can rest assured all of them are well qualified. So then, what do you say to all this? Can we count on you?”

Thirteen apply, thirteen are accepted. There’s selectivity for you. Well, I’ve exhausted every evasive tactic I can imagine. No little woman at home who has to be consulted before any important decision can be made. No elderly father or mother who needs to be tended to. I won’t have to worry about Marthe—she’ll be three thousand miles away.

*Don’t hesitate.*

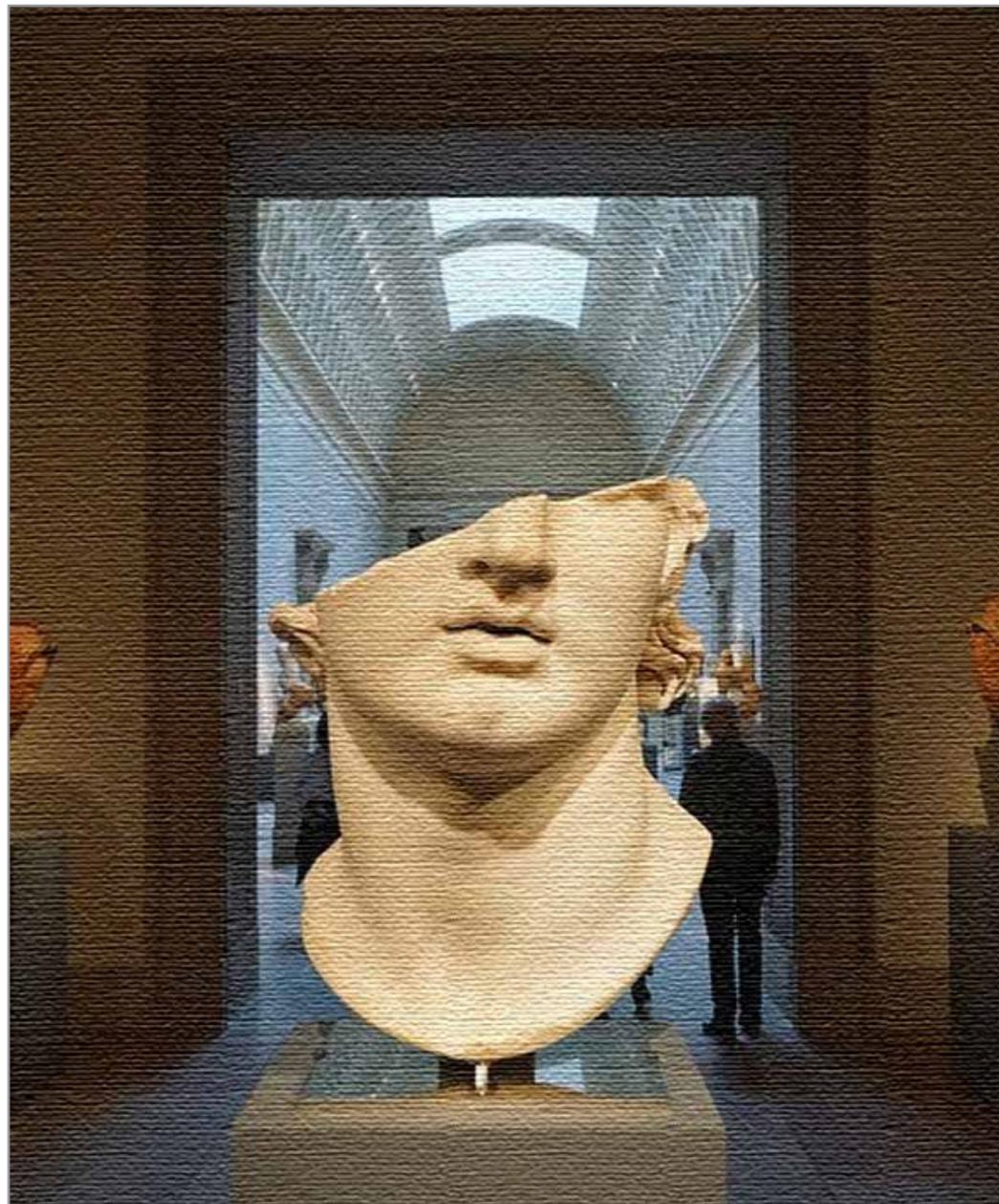
“What an extraordinary opportunity. I’m most grateful for it and delighted to be able to accept!”

“I hoped you’d feel that way. Here are your students.” Irwin nudges a piece of paper in my direction.

They’re in alphabetical order. Only one name is familiar to me.

Fleischmann, Marthe.

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Pic from Pixabay.com

“Readers of the June 2019 issue of Live Encounters Poetry & Fiction will notice that the author has transferred the term Hammersmith Tower to this chapter where it fits in more comfortably with the Ulyssean parallel that follows.”

## CHAPTER IV

Stately, slim Amalia Popper, head secretary of the School of History at Yorkshire University, appears in a smart navy-blue pinstriped suit, her oversized jacket failing to completely obscure an ample bosom.

“Hello, I’m Dr. Aloysius Gogarty from Municipal College. Is Professor Mountjoy available?”

“Dr. Gogarty, I’m afraid Mr. Mountjoy is presently in conference with the chairman of the department.” There’s a lilt to her voice. That’s a good sign.

I wonder what Mountjoy is like? Maybe I can get a hint of that from Miss Popper. Try Alexander’s oblique approach. It worked with Elena.

“What does he teach?”

“Mr. Mountjoy lectures on English and American history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He’s suggested you might be more comfortable waiting in his office than in the foyer,” she says.

Miss Popper leads me down the corridor of the top floor in Hammersmith Tower and opens his office door. I survey the room and my attention is drawn to a corkwood map of England covering the entire wall behind Mountjoy’s desk. It’s something you’d expect to see in a war room scene from a 1940s British film. The lower portion of the map is swarming in colored pins with heads an eighth of an inch or so in diameter. Whatever war is being waged southern England is getting the worst of it.

On Mountjoy's desk stand three Waterford crystal glasses and a large bottle of González Byass sherry. Stationed in close proximity is a framed black and white photograph of a gaunt female, reminiscent of Virginia Woolf. Wife or mother?

"Mr. Mountjoy will be with you shortly. Approximately half ten, I should think. I'm afraid you'll be unattended for a quarter of an hour or so. Will you be able to manage?"

"By all means, thank you."

Miss Popper notices my fascination with the map and starts to offer an explanation "Dickie"—she gasps, and a roselike blush blossoms on her neck—"that is, Mr. Mountjoy, is our admissions tutor. Mr. Mountjoy recruits some of the department's best students from the south of England. He makes presentations on behalf of the university to sixth-formers in that region. Those pins represent his various visitations. I'm afraid he's obliged to visit the south rather frequently."

She slowly raises her left hand to explore the receding bloom. Her recitation seems to have restored equanimity.

"I'm sorry, but I must return to my desk. If I can be of any further assistance, please don't hesitate to lift Mr. Mountjoy's telephone and press the first button there at the top. You might like to glance at our brochure describing the department." Miss Popper removes a ruler covering a neat stack of pamphlets on the desk and hands one to me before carefully restoring the ruler to its original setting. She excuses herself.

I try to focus on the brochure but can only work my way through a thumbnail sketch of the instructional staff. It's the map that intrigues me. The reading material describes him as a senior lecturer, someone not at the top of the ladder, but not at the bottom either. Why is a senior lecturer engaged in the lowly task of recruitment?

Why am I so obsessed with this map? It's the pins. There's something going on here. There's his appointment book. Maybe between that and the pins I can work out a pattern of some sort. No. No. Wait a minute. I spring to my feet, snatch

the ruler from his desk, and tiptoe behind his chair to attack the map. Measuring, measuring. That's it. I've got it!

The door flies open behind me, ushering in a gust of wind that rustles the papers on Mountjoy's desk.

"Ehhhhhh. You must be the American."

It's Mountjoy. He's about ten years older than me and slightly over six feet tall. Mountjoy's a slim man with a closely-cropped head of black woolly hair highlighted by premature streaks of gray above his temples. He's wearing a double-breasted charcoal-gray suit with a pale-blue shirt and a black tie with white stripes. It must be a college tie. I place the ruler back on his desk. "I beg your pardon. I'm Aloysius Gogarty from New York."

"Yehhhhhhs," Mountjoy elongates, while looking in disapproval at my suit. "Somehow I've been able to surmise that. Ordinarily, I'd suggest you make yourself at home, but courtesies of that sort are gratuitous when it comes to Americans, aren't they, old boy?"

I can't decide whether to laugh or apologize, so I say nothing, still frozen in place.

He extends his hand and startles me by using an ironclad grasp to dance me out from behind the desk and deposit me into his visitor's chair. Pleased at his maneuver, Mountjoy flashes a broad smile, exposing a mouthful of glistening teeth. He proceeds to pour two glasses of sherry and reaches across the desk to deliver mine. It's barely eleven o'clock in the morning, so I adopt my "I don't ordinarily drink at this hour" look. It's ignored, and I meekly accept the glass.

"You could use this, old boy. Culture shock or I should say the inevitable trauma engendered when someone from your hemisphere finds himself in the midst of a bona fide culture. It's similar to a time-warp experience, I should think."

"I get it. In this case going back in time."



"I'm told," Mountjoy says, ignoring my riposte, "you're working on one of the greats. Frederick, isn't it? You're undoubtedly aware of Frederick's frugality, but did you know he was frightfully defensive about the costs incurred by his sizable stable of courtiers? He justified it by reassuring all those concerned that 'dancers, prostitutes and professors come cheap.'"

I nearly choke on a trickle of sherry still halfway down my gullet and spray a fine mist over Mountjoy's desk.

He beams with glee at my response while wiping the desk clean with his handkerchief. "Well, well, well, Dr. Gogarty. Here we are awaiting you with great expectations, and you shower us with great exhortations."

I laugh and regain my composure. "By the way, it's Alexander the Great. I'm putting the final touches on a biography of Alexander."

"Alexander the Great?" He grimaces. "Aren't there 3,197 biographies of Alexander already?"

"Well, not that many. Perhaps a hundred or so."

"Stop right there. Is your pilgrimage to our sceptered isle going to be a learning experience, or are you on holiday?"

"Septic isle?" I ask, as if I've misunderstood the phrase.

He roars in appreciation of my intentional misunderstanding and swears by his wife's picture—which is pointed toward the visitor rather than himself—that he'll appropriate the term and flaunt it as if it were his own.

"I'll assume you choose learning experience. Let the lessons begin. One never lies in even numbers, for if you do, the lie will fail to achieve its objective, which is, after all, to deceive, is it not? If you say, 'I've done that a thousand times,' no one will take your claim seriously. On the other hand, if you say with conviction, 'I've done that thirty-seven times,' it renders the assertion infinitely more credible, regardless of its validity."

"Your point is well taken. In defense of writing yet another biography of Alexander, I do have a different take on the man. My emphasis is on his excessive drinking."

"Excessive? Surely"—he screws up his face in faux distress—"you don't mean to suggest he drank too much? We're talking about a chap who conquered over two million square miles, did he not?"

Before I can answer, Mountjoy continues.

"Wasn't it your Lincoln who, when someone suggested Ulysses S. Grant drank too much, said, 'Tell me what brand of whiskey Grant drinks. I'd like to send a barrel of it to my other generals.' In him, old boy, you had a president."

"Yes, that's true. But, for some, getting sozzled lubricates genius, while for others it proves to be debilitating."

Mountjoy nods. "I choose to believe I fall into the former category. And you?"

"Me too." This is going to be quite a year.

"Come to think of it, Gogarty, your scribbling on Alexander's tipping could be of value. Every time you lift a jar you are, in a manner of speaking, at work in the laboratory, are you not?"

"I never thought of it that way, but you're right, you know."

"Ehh, yehhs. I do know. Well, let's assume the world is your laboratory and drink to Britannia, you, and your wards."

He raises his glass and I raise mine.

"Down to business. I've been designated by Professor Bisgood—that is, Professor Bertram Endicott Bisgood, our chairman, referred to henceforth by the initials BEB, as the link between you, your program, and the university. You'll occasionally hear me refer to him as Bertie. Refrain from doing so yourself unless he asks you to."

We place our empty glasses down at the same time and a mellow glow steals over me.

"What do you think of the sherry?" He refills our glasses.

"It's the best I've ever had." If the truth be known, I've never tasted sherry before. It does kindle the veins though, like the mild fire of wine.

"Not the very best, but 'twill do." We reach for our glasses simultaneously.

Mountjoy lifts the bottle with his left hand and studies the label. "The great-great-grandson of the González and I roomed together at Magdalen."

"You roomed together at maudlin? Did others room at melancholia and moribundity?"

He stops, drains his glass, and settles his chin into cupped hands.

"Magdalen College . . . Oxford? M-A-G"—he wags his head with each letter—"D-A-L-E-N?"

"Ohhhh, so it's Mary Maudlin now, is it?"

"Yehhhs. And it's been that way for seven hundred and thirteen years. You'd better stick with me, old boy, or your music-hall act will make you comic relief in this domain."

"Isn't Maudlin," I say casually, as if I've always pronounced it that way, "Oscar Wilde's college?"

"It was. He's been dead for some time now."

"True. But his spirit lingers on. I can see it in you." I laugh freely, this time drawn toward the moose-like features of Mountjoy's wife.

He notices. "That's Priscilla—a woman as purebred as one's likely to find among the upper class in times like these. In fact, one might even say her beauty lies in her genealogy. Nevertheless, approved by M'mah, whose standards are, shall we say, imposing." He looks back at me. "I say, before we go any further, why, may I ask, do you wear those hideous glasses?"

"I have to. They're necessary because of an eye disease which happens to bear the same initials as your chairman, BEB. Extreme light sensitivity, old boy."

Mountjoy clears his throat. "Nothing, my dear boy, nothing is more vulgar than an American attempting to speak like an Englishman. Now, whatever this illness requiring such obscene spectacles may be, let me advise you to alter its name."

"But BEB is the acronym for its name. Benign essential blepharospasm. Do you want me to choke on that each time I describe it?"

"Yehhhs, precisely. Either that or simply refer to it as DMZ or LTD or DOA, any variant of your choice, but not—I repeat, not—BEB. There are those in our department who look upon our chairman rather unfavorably. Bertie is well aware of this, and it fuels his paranoia. We can't have BEB living in fear that some malcontent will make a malicious analogy between your affliction and Bertie's stewardship of the department.

"Furthermore, I'm numbered among his favorites, which yields advantages, none of which I'm prepared to relinquish. And, I daresay, I suspect you don't really need to wear those preposterous eyeglasses at all . . . do you?"

I fidget and Mountjoy takes notice of my distress.

"I withdraw the question," he says with a rueful grin. "Furthermore, and upon due reflection, under no circumstances should you discard the glasses; just your explanation for them."

"Huh?"



“They”—he points to my glasses—“are, in any event, of use to you and hence to us.”

“I think you’re supposed to brief me on procedures and protocol,” I say, attempting to redirect the conversation.

“Procedures yes, protocol no. Learning our *modus operandi* will allow you to conduct your business in a more proficient and less taxing manner. I can be of help there. Genteel behavior is a byproduct of breeding. Unfortunately, no one can help you in that respect. I can say this, however: your year here will be a painful ordeal if you intend to say and do the right thing. Simply put, you will never succeed in acquiring social graces.

“Just bear in mind at all times that you’re only an American. Therefore, aside from certain extremities—for example, sodomizing one of your male students while class is still in session—the more barbarically you behave, the more likely you’ll find yourself well received here.”

“I get it. The more asinine I act, the more it reassures all parties concerned I’m exactly what I claim to be, an American, and therefore nothing to concern themselves with.”

“Precisely. And you need not, for the most part, act. Just . . . eh . . . be yourself. You might, of course, occasionally speak a bit more like Humphrey Bogart or Edward G. Robinson. And . . . oh yes, do smoke a cheap cigar now and then.

“The purpose in all this is for you to embody the image of the American we British have come to hold dear to our hearts and loathe at the same time. And, in a similar vein,” he gestures toward my clothes, “let’s not ignore the advantage of being oafishly shabby. Thus, for the most part, almost anything unwonted you do will be welcome.”

“What, may I ask, prompted you to speak to me so candidly? Don’t get me wrong, I’m anything but offended. I just never expected to feel this comfortable with anyone over here, particularly in a university setting.”

“Breeding and instinct, my dear boy, breeding and instinct. And, I might add, the manner in which you inhale the fruit of Andalusian labor, even though sherry is clearly not your customary beverage. I knew by instinct that you were a man”—he contorts his jowls to speak out of the side of his mouth—“wid cobbler’s awls, who spends a night or two at the rub-a-dub.”

Is this local dialect, or is he reciting a fairy tale?

“That’s Cockney, old boy. It means you’ve got balls and obviously have lifted a jar or two hither and thither.”

“I knew that,” I lie.

“Really? Then you must have noticed an exhibition of Bristol Cities when BEB’s secretary, Miss Popper, greeted you.”

“Duck soup,” I say, eager to level the playing field. “Titties. We call them titties.”

The door flies open once again, and a short plump gray-bearded man projects his head into the room. Still grasping the doorknob, he stares down at the floor and says absently, “I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I had no idea you were having breakfast.” He enters the room and closes the door behind him.

Mountjoy, unruffled, says, “Oh, Bertie, this is Dr. Gogarty, our American visitor. Dr. Gogarty, this is Professor Bisgood, Professor Bertram Endicott Bisgood.”

“Well, I’m honored, sir. I’ve heard a great deal about you and, of course, your work on wool combing and worsted spinning in West Yorkshire,” I say. I’d just read the title of his book in the departmental brochure, and noticed it came out in 1937 with no other publications being mentioned except “numerous book reviews in scholarly journals.”

BEB blushes but seems pleased by my reference to his book. He clears his throat, guffaws, and looks down as he rocks slightly back and forth on the balls of his feet.

"I'm delighted to make your acquaintance. Mountjoy here should be of considerable help when it comes to policies and procedures and things of that sort, but I may be useful in other matters. Please don't hesitate to call upon me."

He looks with curiosity at my glasses. "Is our lighting a trifle too harsh for you, Dr. Gogarty? We can do something about that, I should think."

"Oh, Bertie," Mountjoy interjects, "Dr. Gogarty here has a nasty ophthalmic condition making it necessary to wear those beastly spectacles of his. They reduce the impact of light on his retinal equipment."

"How unfortunate for you, Dr. Gogarty. What affliction is that?"

Mountjoy's eyes rotate anxiously in my direction.

A moment's hesitation.

"OPO," I say, tapping on my lens.

"Really?" the chairman responds. "Be a good chap and remind me what OPO signifies."

"Obscurum per obscurius."

"Oh, yes, indeed. OPO." He nods and waves an open hand as he leaves.

"Hell's teeth," Mountjoy gasps. "Where did that come from?"

"I have no idea. Maybe from hell's teeth, whatever they are."

"Obscurum per obscurius, eh? If I can still trust my Latin, that phrase means clarifying an obscurity by referring to something even more obscure. How good is your Latin, Gogarty?"

"Fairly good."

"Fairly good, eh? Well, aren't you one lucky chap. You see, poor Bertie's a redbrick product. Any Latin he may've learned in grammar school is far too rusty to be of use to him in working out whole phrases. If you want to see BEB nod convulsively, cast an entire sentence at him. But I must warn you, there are those here who are able not only to decipher your feeble subterfuge but will gleefully torment you with Ciceronian queries. Any display of esoteric terminology should be kept to a bare minimum, or you'll find yourself hanging alongside it."

"Well, I'll have to stick to OPO now, won't I?"

"Better than BEB, my dear fellow, better than BEB. If they ask, tell them you don't remember the Latin. They'll find that plausible and amusing. In fact, it'll help confirm their suspicions of your vacuity. Incidentally, I see you've gotten yourself a mackintosh. That's a wise move in this corner of the world."

"I see you have one too," I say agreeably, pointing toward his coat rack.

He smirks. "That, my dear boy, is a Burberry. Do get yourself settled in. I'm off to the south later today on university business, but let's see each other soon."

I think I'll keep my revelation about his recruiting trips to myself for now. It should be deployed at just the right time for maximum impact.

"Oh, before you go, Bertie suggested I ask you for facsimiles of the students' applications to your program. We're curious as to who these young people are you're inflicting upon us. Make no mistake, we're well aware of what's going on in that Garden of Eden of yours—race riots, assassinations, druggery, hippies, etcetera, etcetera. And these students are, after all, products of your"—cough, cough—"culture."

I smile at him savoring his own sarcasm. "Please keep this to yourself, but I know next to nothing about our students. The dean of faculty, who's also the Grand Wizard of the program, asked me to be resident director at the last minute and delayed passing their applications on to me until just before I left for the airport."



“Hmm. I’m sorry to tell you this, old boy, but that sounds rather tactical on your dean’s part. So, you know nothing of substance about any of them?”

“I do know one of them, a student of mine. The others? From their applications, two of them may be a problem, but that remains to be seen. They arrive on Monday and I’m meeting them in London. Any suggestions as to where I can have them stay for a few days?”

“Not to worry. I’ll book them at Passfield Hall. It’s part of the London School of Economics and I’ll have an old schoolboy chum there take care of your students. I’ll arrange for you to be at the Hotel Russell. It has tolerable accommodations and is within walking distance of the hall.”

“Shouldn’t I be staying at Passfield Hall with the students?”

“My dear boy, either you adjust to British life or you wallow in the trammels of misguided egalitarianism. Which is it?”

Where does he get these phrases from? “Somehow the former sounds more attractive. I’ll adjust.”

“Splendid. Rather than lowering yourself by living in the fulsome squalor of student barracks, you reside like a gentleman at the Hotel Russell and thereby demonstrate that success breeds privilege and comfort.”

“Any suggestions as to what I should say to them? This is supposed to be an orientation meeting of some sort, and I don’t know a damn thing about England.”

“First of all, keep it just that way. Most of what you think you’ve learned here will be something you’ve misunderstood. Second of all, tell them the best way to experience England is without resorting to some specious tour book as a guide.”

I smile and nod.

He leans over and replenishes our drinks. “What can you tell me about the student whom you know? Perhaps he can offer a clue as to what we’re taking on here.”

I hesitate. “It’s a she. Marthe Fleischmann. Brilliant young woman. She has a 3.97 GPA—that’s a student’s grade-point average, based on a scale of four.”

“Marthe Fleischmann? Hmm, sounds like a New York student. I’m more interested in weaknesses than strengths. Are there any potential problems with her? What does she intend to read?”

“Medieval paleography, Beowulf, Old English, Old Norse, and Medieval Latin, as I recall.”

“So, a glutton for the arcane, eh? Well, her plate’s full. We won’t have to concern ourselves with Miss Fleischmann, will we?”

“I hope not.”

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Pic from Pixabay.com

## CHAPTER XX

“So, it’s Ensign Ewart, not Hughes, huh? Who was this Ewart?”

My chubby, flush-faced taxi driver responds with a spirited soliloquy. “He was a lad from Kilmarnock who enlisted in the Scots Greys around the time of Napoleon and became a sergeant. At Waterloo, the Greys and the Gordon Highlanders faced the French Forty-Fifth, the ‘Invincibles,’ as the frogs called them. The Scottish lads were champing at the bit to get at them, and when the officers finally let them loose, they rode at the French line screaming, ‘Scotland Fore ere,’ scaring the French out of their *fookin* lace skivvies. Ewart went straight for the French standard bearer, cut his way through a half dozen of the bastards, snatched their eagle and carried it up on high back to the regiment. They gave him the Waterloo medal, and after that it wasn’t just the *fookin* officers who got medals, but men from the ranks—the ones who did all the dirty work.”

“You should teach history. You’re better than the ones who get paid to do it. Is Ewart’s grave around here? I enjoy rummaging through old cemeteries and looking at epitaphs.”

“Well, it used to be at the castle, which is only a stone’s throw from the pub. But it’s in Midlothian now until they fix it up and bring him back. His spirit’s in the pub, though, and they’ve got mementos of what I’ve been telling you about. In fact, here we are now. Hoist one in his honor while you’re there.”

“I shall. And I’ll hoist one in your honor, as well.” I tip him with a couple of pound notes for his recital, and he shouts at my back, “You’re *fookin* officer material, you are, laddie.”

Mountjoy said this pub is on one of the highest hills in Edinburgh. Get a load on and roll all the way home. Not this time, old boy. Controlled drinking is the order of the day.

Ensign Ewart's pub is brimming with memorabilia. It looks like a cross between a museum and a ritzy pub. The barkeep seems affable enough. I'll ask for advice.

"What would you recommend, to wet the whistle, my good man?"

"Well, if you're one for ales, have a lick at our Deuchars IPA."

"Why not?"

I drain the schooner. "Yes sir. That does the trick all right, and it's not as stale as some of the lagers down south."

"Our beer is hand-pumped up from the cellar. There's a difference, you know."

"Now I do. It looks like you've got three more kinds there. Let's have a taste of each in turn if you don't mind."

"Here's some wee glasses, if you want a sampling."

I drink them in rapid succession. "Well, they're good except for the last one. It doesn't have much life in it."

He agrees. "It tastes like dishwater. That's the one you Americans usually rave about. But I can see you're a man who knows his way around a tap."

"I've drained a jar or two in my time, but I'm trying to keep an eye on myself. I've been known to get carried away on occasion."

"It's many a good man's fault. Who hasn't had a night or two he'd rather forget?"

"Nobody I'm comfortable with. I'm only passing through Scotland, though, so I should get a sip of your malt whiskey. You do have it, don't you?"

"Aye. Speyside, Lowland, forty varieties. Is that enough for ya?"

"I should think so. I only want to partake of a few, though, and I'd like to remember which ones they are."

"I tell you what, laddie. I'll write them down on this here coaster. You can tuck it away and keep it as a souvenir. Now, let me tell you something about whiskey. It's like a woman: it's all a matter of taste. I can give you something smooth with a long, round finish; something spicy with a peaty aftertaste; or something soft with a heathery, honey flavor. What suits your mood today?"

"Do you have any with red hair and one green and one brown eye?"

He laughs. "That won't be in until next week. What would you settle for now?"

"Surprise me. Let me have a couple of fingers of something you'd drink yourself and a refill on the Deuchars to wash it down."

The bartender places an empty larger-than-conventional shot glass on the bar alongside a schooner of ale.

"What's this?" I ask.

He points to each in turn. "This is the Deuchars, and this is what I drink."

"But that's empty."

"I know. You asked me to give you what I drink. When it comes to booze, this is it for me. Even Bucky Barabas hasn't made it past these lips for the last seven years."

"Nothing *at all*?"

"Me dear departed father once told me, he said, 'Billy boy, every man has his own God-given quota when it comes to drink, and you'll know when yours has been reached. That'll be the crossroads. Either you'll keep sucking it up like a sponge or you'll step back and watch the other laddies blow themselves up with it.' I reached my limit seven years and thirteen days ago."

"How did you know your time was up?"

"When it dawned on me I was allergic to the stuff."

"Allergic? How did you know you were allergic to alcohol?"

"Because when I overdid it, I kept breaking out in handcuffs!"

I choke on a mouthful of Deuchars, spitting some of it on the bar. He wipes up the mess cheerfully, pleased with my reaction.

"Did you just stop? It must be difficult. The good juice is everywhere, and you, with your job, are surrounded by it."

"I got, and still get, help. Other lads who're in the same boat meet twice a week, and we remind ourselves it's not for us anymore."

"Is that Alcoholics Unanimous?"

He laughs. "Anonymous. It's Alcoholics Anonymous."

"I know. I was pulling your leg. My brother Tommy back in New York is a member of your club, and he hasn't had a drink in three years."

"Well then, good for him. If the thought ever passes your own mind, have a chat with him. He'll tell ya what it's all about. Better yet, get to a meeting with him and see if it's for you."

"I'll remember that. Well, where were we? Oh, yeah. If you were back in your prime and decided you wanted nothing but the best, what would you ask for?"

"This." He lifts a bottle from behind the bar, pours it in a shot glass, and says, "Macallan, ten-year old."

I down the shot. "Oh my, that's smooth. I tell you what. I'd like one more, a large one, and I was wondering if you could point me toward a more local type of pub. This has been great, and you're a fountain of information, but"—I lean over to him and whisper—"your joint is a little too touristy for me. It's crawling with Americans."

He chuckles. "I know what you mean. You're looking for a pub with some local color, a knockabout type of a place that sells cheap beer and rotten whiskey. Edinburgh's bursting at the seams with them. There's one over on Little Britain Street where the university students and some locals hang out. But I have to warn you, you're just as likely to see a brawl between those two groups as not. Is that more in line with what you're thinking?"

"Exactly." I slip him a five-pound note under my palm and ask him to call a cab. He looks around, pockets the fiver, and pours a shot of whiskey from a bottle previously hidden from view in a cabinet behind the bar.

It burns as it goes down. "Whoa! This stuff is volcanic. What is it?"

"Cask-strength Macallan. On the house." He starts pouring another shot. I put up my right hand to stop him, but it's too late. Well, can't waste it. "What's the name of that pub?"

"Barney Kiernan's."

"That's an Irish name."

"It sure is. We've got quite a few Irishmen around here. Nothing to brag about, mind you, but we've got them. Keep to yourself and curb your tongue there, though, laddie. If the students and the Irish ruffians aren't beating the piss out of one another, they're just as likely to pick on a stranger. I'll have a taxi take you right to the front door. You'll be there in two shakes of a stick. Oh, here's something you can enjoy even if you're not crazy about the crowd there."

He takes a small box from underneath the counter and opens it.

"A cigar? You're talking to the right man. I enjoy a good cigar every once in a while."

"This isn't a good cigar; it's a great cigar. This, my friend, is a genuine Cuban cigar. It was given to me by one of my sailor friends. Cubans are the best."

"I know. I know."

He leans over so no one else can hear what he has to say. "Did you know laddie, that those chiquitas in Havana roll the tobacco slowly back and forth over their inner thighs, dangerously close to their private parts, just to give each and every authentic cigar the faint scent of Spanish pussy?"

He has a way with words.

"No, I can't say I knew that. But I'm sure it'll enhance my appreciation of it."

"Here's your taxi. It's right there at the curb."

"Thanks. The best of luck to you."

"You too. Don't forget to talk to your brother about the club."

I raise and wave my right hand as I walk toward the taxi.

"Barney Kiernan's please." The cabdriver hears my accent, turns around, and gives me a strange look.

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yup."

"Okay. Kiernan's it is."

Jesus. It smells like stale beer in here, and there's a hint of urine coming from somewhere. Who cares, as long as it's not mine? The bartender fits right in. He's got a scar on his left cheek and a black patch over his right eye. Sure enough, students on one side, Irishmen on the other. I'll station myself in neutral territory in between the warring parties.

"Hello, may I have a beer please?"

"I'm not a mind reader," the bartender snaps. "What kind do you want?"

Charming. "Half a pint of ale, please."

"So, you're on the wagon, huh?" He roars at his own comment, momentarily drawing attention from both factions. I'd better establish my credentials.

"You're right. I've been on the wagon long enough. I'll have a pint of bitter, and a double shot of Macallan."

"Now you're talking. We're not a high tea operation around here, if you know what I mean, but we do have Macallan."

He turns his head, so he can see me with his good eye and barks, "What's your name?"

Throw him a curve ball. "Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdale Farrell, but my friends call me Nemo."

He glowers. "All right, Mr. Nemo. My name is Mickey Cusack. I'm just an ordinary citizen, but you can call me Mr. Cusack." He smiles mockingly and walks toward one of the students whose calling out, "Mickey."

Everyone's smoking here. It's time to light up my prized possession. God, that's smooth. No whiff of female genitalia yet, but you probably have to be well into it to get all the benefits. The Irish have the dartboard. I'm surprised they're not competing against the students. That would guarantee a donnybrook.

"Mr. Cusack."

He turns his head in my direction. "What do you want?"

Cusack's barely my height but has massive shoulders and arms. He must've been a boxer or a shot-putter. He's also got the hound of the Baskervilles stationed close by. This dog is enormous, and his ears and muzzle look like they belong to a wolf.

"I'll have another double and another bitter please. Great-looking dog you've got there."

He gets my drinks.

"I'm glad you like him. Owen, come over here and say hello to the gentleman."

Owen gallops over to me, plants his front paws up on the bar, flashes his incisors, and snarls ferociously. I jump back, drawing belly laughs from both contingents.

Cusack grunts. "Down, Owen. Back over there." The beast's paws drop to the floor, and he mopes back to his spot and collapses.

Reclaim your post at the bar.

Cusack's mouth curls back in a vulpine snarl. "You still like him?"

"Sure. He's an exquisite animal. You're a lucky man." I get it. Owen's the bouncer and Cusack's in charge of public relations here.

He puts the drinks down, points to his patch, and says, "Lucky, huh?" He lifts his patch up so I can see his vacant socket. I turn to get a better look, and the tip of my cigar narrowly misses his good eye.

"What the fuh—are you looking to finish the job?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cusack. It's my damn reflexes." I need to change the subject. "What's that the students are drinking?"

"Buckfast." He brings the bottle over and lets me examine the label.

"My, oh my. Thirty proof and loaded with caffeine. You can get drunk and stay wide awake at the same time. Tailor made for students. I wonder what it tastes like."

He pours me a touch.

My God is that sweet! Look at the students. They're going to town on this stuff. I glance left at the Irish, and sure enough, most of them are drinking Guinness. Cusack awaits my verdict on Buckfast.

"Okay, I guess, but not for me. Too cough-syrupy. Another double of Macallan please."

"Now there's a man after me own heart. I'm with you," he says, leaning over to speak confidentially. "These students get polluted fast and cheap on this panther piss and wind up looking for trouble."

"That's what they're like," I say agreeably.

One student in a drinking circle close to me shouts over in my direction, "So we have an American here, huh?" He announces in a loud voice, "There's a stranger in our house causing trouble, like they do everywhere they go."

That's all I need—a brawl. I look over at him. "Yes. I'm visiting from New York. What are you studying at the university?"

He puts a scowl on his face and belches. "Syphilisation. But what would you know about that?" he asks, looking to bait me.

"Civilization? Western European? Asiatic? African?"

"American. You know why? It's the easiest way to get a degree because there's so little to study. Instead, we hang around here waiting for people like you to enlighten us about your contributions to the world, like slavery and imperialism. Since you're here, why don't you explain to us what the fook you're doing in Vietnam, and when you plan to get the fook out of there?" The other students grumble in agreement.

"I'm sorry, my dear boy, but I'm not privy to information of that sort. But, from what I do know, we're trying to help the South Vietnamese stay independent by stopping Ho Chi Minh and his thugs from steamrolling over them."

I gesture for another drink and offer my adversary one, but he waves me off scornfully. He's enjoying his tirade too much. The Irishmen to the left of me are becoming interested in our exchange. If it comes to it, maybe I can get some support from them. This student is smaller than I am and not particularly husky, but he's going at it like a bulldog.

"When are you Americans going to get the fook out of Vietnam?"

I roll the cigar back and forth across my mouth several times, drawing deeply from it, and sending a string of circular smoke rings in the boy's direction.

"I'll tell you what, laddie. When I get back to the States, I'll give Lyndon a call and let him know how you feel. In the meantime, don't you think you're being a bit too modest about your own role in slavery and imperialism?"

"I and we"—he sweeps his right hand across his group—"have nothing to do with any of that. And we certainly have nothing to do with war. We're pacifists."

How do you like that—truculent pacifists. "Really? What about the British Empire, or has that slipped your mind? Okay. Let's pretend you're the prime minister of Great Britain and I'm the president of the United States. I've just received your ultimatum to evacuate Vietnam, and I agree, with one proviso."

"What's that?" he growls.

"That you withdraw all your troops from Ireland. Just a little quid pro quo between imperialists."

"Ireland has nothing to do with this. That's an entirely different question. You're making false comparisons. The Irish needed us then, and they need us now. They're like Americans. They don't have what it takes to govern themselves."

Shouts come from my left. "Like fookin hell we don't. You little shit."

My God. Cusack's urging the Irishmen to ratchet it up. I turn back to the students. "Aren't any of you reading history at the university? If you were, you'd know that Henry II's lads invaded Ireland in 1171, and the British have been exploiting the Irish ever since. Eight hundred years of oppression is long enough, wouldn't you say?"

The Irish begin stomping their feet, clapping their hands, and shouting, "Out of Ireland. Out of Ireland." Cusack starts chanting along with them, and now he's waving a bat in the direction of the students. He slams it down so hard on the bar we all stop dead in our tracks and turn to him.

Cusack hollers, "Let's hear once more from each of the parties concerned, and that's that. If anyone disagrees, they can continue discussing it with my partner here." He taps the top of his head. In one leaping bound Owen lands on the bar, scattering drinks in all directions and sending a bone-chilling howl across the room.

I retrieve my drink in time. Cusack snaps his finger, and the hound retreats. Then he turns to the student and orders him to make his final statement.

I signal for another double.

"We want you," the student thunders, pointing both of his index fingers at me, "to get the fook out of Vietnam, and we want it now!"

"My dear boy, I hereby solemnly swear that the very moment the last British soldier departs from Irish soil, our evacuation from Vietnam begins."

Glasses are breaking, and punches are flying in every direction. Oh Jesus, I'm right in the middle of it. I've been hit in the face. I'm down. My God, they're kicking me. Christ, I'm bleeding. I feel the wind get knocked out of me and begin gasping for breath.

The hound—he's getting the students off me. Whistles. What are those whistles? It's the police. They're picking me up.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm Okay," I tell a constable. "I just have to get washed up. . . . No. I don't need to go to the hospital. No. No doctor. I'll be all right. I need a taxi. . . . No. I don't want to file any charges. I'll be fine. Don't worry. . . . Yeah, thanks. I'm going to my hotel."

They steer me toward a taxi, and I collapse into the back seat. "The Royal Scot Hotel on Glasgow Road. . . . Sure, I'm Okay. No problem."

I finally get a glimpse of myself in the hotel bathroom mirror. Jesus Christ! I look like Rocky Graziano after a Tony Zale fight. I'd better get home and go into hiding. I can't let anyone I know see me like this. There's still a couple of a weeks to go before we're due back at the university. Hopefully, I'll look more human by then. What's next? Breaking out in handcuffs?

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James Joyce Statue, Dublin (Ireland).  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:James\\_Joyce\\_Statue\\_-\\_Dublin.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:James_Joyce_Statue_-_Dublin.JPG)

## CHAPTER XXVI

Doomsday has arrived. Budgen drops me off at the train station and I purchase a first-class ticket to London and, perhaps, Hades. Go there in style.

On this trip Aloysius Magnus will drift into a majestic state of mind and devise a masterful strategy for the battle of Cockfosters Station. First, wash down five magic tablets with royal coffee, thereby banishing headaches from the realm.

Aha! Here's an empty car where the great one can doze off on his voyage south. But, alas, His Highness is a serial dreamer, and the most outré of nightmares come in the wake of lifting one jar too many. For a while it was those outlandish newspaper stories, but lately, it seems, the play's the thing . . .

ALOYSIUS

Where am I? A brothel? What did you say . . . I mean, who did you say you were? Zoe? Life? You are life? Jesus. Life is a whore. Why are you smoking a Cuban cigar, and where's your twin sister, Thanatos? You don't know her? Your own sister, Death? Oh, Jesus, what are you doing? I must warn you. I won't pay. I never pay. Hey, you're giving me money. Yeah, that's okay. Who's that? Bella? She's the boss? Where'd she go? There you are. Elena, it's you, isn't it?

BELLAELENA

I am whoever you want me to be, but before you do anything else, I want you to look through this.

(She points Aloysius toward a zoetrope, which he peers into.)

ALOYSIUS

That's you Elena. Who's that slimy-looking character with you?

BELLAELENA

That's my husband, Dr. Delagracia. Let Zoe assist you while you watch. Zoe, throw that cigarillo away. Your mouth can be better engaged than with a cylinder of rank weed.



(Zoe undoes Aloysius's belt, easing him down into a leather chair while kneeling in front of him—not, it seems, to pray. Dr. Delagracia takes out his black bag, opens Elena's blouse, and places his stethoscope on her left breast. He listens and nods, then has her lie supine while he lifts up her skirt. He takes a tiny brush out of his bag and strokes her red pubic hair with his left hand, while placing his stethoscope on her vaginal labia with his right hand. He listens intently, nods his head in approval, and proceeds to expose his black priapic member.)

ALOYSIUS

What are you doing to me? I don't want to see this. Let me out of here.

(Aloysius squirms to liberate himself but thickened leather straps project from the chair's arms and lock him in. Zoe gets up wiping her mouth, but Aloysius realizes it's not Zoe. It's Marthe Fleischmann.)

ALOYSIUS

Marthe, what are you doing here?

KITTY

What's wrong with you, sir? Had a little too much to drink today? I'm not Marthe. I'm Kitty Higgins, and, good sir, may I ask, what in blazes are you doing here?

ALOYSIUS

Well . . .

(Aloysius pushes her out of the way and sees a young woman in her early twenties pressing her face up against the window of the zoetrope.)

ALOYSIUS

Deborah . . . is that you?

DEBORAH

It's me all right. Do you want proof?

(She backs up and reveals a transparent rectangle in her abdomen. The window acts as a camera lens and zooms in on Deborah, who's now standing in front of a painting of a young boy in an Eton suit carrying a book called *Aloysius's Wake*.)

ALOYSIUS

Who's that?

DEBORAH

That's your son. Or, I should say, that's what he'd look like today if you'd let me have him. Would you like to see what he really looks like today?

ALOYSIUS

No! Let me go.

(Aloysius pulls in vain at the chair to release himself, only to realize his shoes have been nailed to the floor.)

DEBORAH

Well, you will, whether you like it or not.

(Aloysius tries to shut his eyes, but maggots have a restraining grip on his eyelids. Deborah picks up a large jar with a male fetus immersed in formaldehyde. It's a dwarf's face, mauve and wrinkled.)

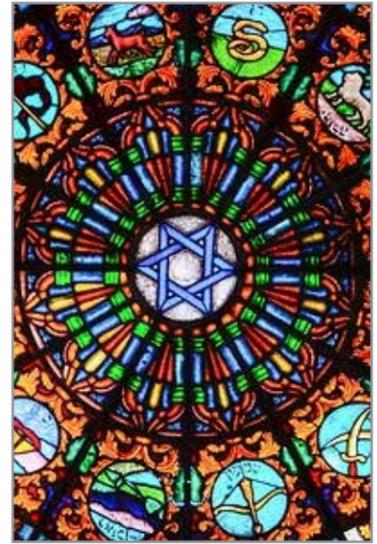
ALOYSIUS

I was drinking heavily at the time.

DEBORAH

You always drink heavily. Tell your son that and see what he says.

(She rushes toward him with the jar and pushes it up against the zoetrope's window. The image blurs, and the young woman and her jar disintegrate. The blurry face of a woman with anomalous eyes and auburn hair approaches Aloysius through the zoetrope.)



ALOYSIUS  
Ma?

WOMAN  
Yes, Tabeel, it's your Mameleh. Don't listen to those who would bring you down with them. You are going to become a great man one day who helps others find themselves. Therein dwells your greatness. But to do this you must take control of your cup, your wallet, and your temperament. You must learn what the heart is and what it feels, and discover the power of the word known to all men . . . l-o-

(She disappears without finishing the spelling.)

ALOYSIUS  
Mameleh!

(A priest wearing a black cassock enters stage left. A large silver Celtic cross is hanging from his neck set against a blood-red circular woolen cloth. A Hasidic rabbi enters stage right, wearing a black rekel and a dark red gartel encircling his waist.)

PRIEST  
Why have you forsaken your son, my son?

(He points to a Christlike figure on the cross, which metamorphoses into a fetus.)

RABBI  
And why have you forsaken the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Rosenbach?

PRIEST  
Let us hear your sins. Your most grievous sins and your venial sins.

ALOYSIUS  
Aren't sins their own punishment? Why am I going through this with you? I will not genuflect.

(The priest becomes a wraith and vanishes. Aloysius stares at the rabbi.)

RABBI  
I will forgive you.

(He traces the Star of David in the air with his index finger.)

RABBI  
Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris.

(The rabbi vaporizes.)

“King's Cross Station. King's Cross Station.” It's the conductor:

It's going to take all day to shake myself loose from that horror. Sleep's supposed to be a cure for what ails you. Sometimes it just magnifies the agony. The Greeks said the gods speak to you through your dreams. What are they trying to tell me?

Signal for a taxi.

“Russell Hotel, please.” I check in at the hotel and wait for Mountjoy's call.

Well, if it happens, it's going to be in the Tube at either Cockfosters Station or Waterloo Station. Elena's father's pursuers will either confront him, kiss him, or kill him. That is unless Mountjoy or I can intervene if and when things get ugly. It's preposterous. We have no idea what to do. I should have never let Mountjoy volunteer for this, but I can't be at both stations simultaneously. And all this to please my fair lady Elena. What price glory? Torquemada will probably emerge unscathed, his type always does and Mountjoy or I will have our tickets punched—permanently.

Finally, the phone rings. “Hello, Your Lordship. . . Ha! You're right. Why screw it up with plans at this stage? If I get there early and wander around outside Cockfosters, what sort of neighborhood will I be in? . . . It sounds decent enough. What about Waterloo? . . . That bad, huh? Sure boss, I know what you're talking about. We call it public housing.

It's always a problem. What will you do if the locals try to mug you? . . . Ha! My money is on them. I'd better get going. Good luck at Waterloo. I'm on my way to Cockfosters. Bye."

Nothing unusual about the station, except its above ground. I like that. It's less nerve-racking than that buried-alive feeling you get from the subway. There's a large clock I can see from the platform. Twenty after nine. Wait. Here's somebody. This could be de la Flora. Get close enough to be sure without letting him recognize you. Take off your beret and glasses and stroll casually in his direction.

It's not him. Uniform back on.

I pace up and down the platform endlessly and then check the time. The clock says ten twenty-five. No sign of Torquemada. Dammit. I wish something would happen this clock-watching is torture. What did Mountjoy say? Give it another half-hour and then fold up your tent. Finally, the clock strikes eleven. Well, I stood ready to serve, like Malachi wearing the collar of gold. Alas, to no avail.

Take the Tube back to the hotel and maybe get a good night's sleep this time. Mountjoy said we'd compare notes tomorrow. Probably didn't expect anything to happen. What's this? Oh yeah. I told them to leave an iced bottle of Dom Perignon in my room. There'll be no victory to celebrate tonight. So, what? They're all Pyrrhic victories, anyway. One thing's for sure: I can't waste this bottle of champagne. That would be criminal.

What's that noise? Where am I? Jesus, it's the chambermaid. I shout out I need a few minutes. It's eleven o'clock already? No nightmares. If I dress quickly, I can grab a cab and still catch an express train to Yorkshire.

There's a taxi right outside the hotel. "King's Cross Station, please." Mountjoy's going to ridicule me for wasting his time. I thought he'd call this morning, but he must have left at daybreak to get back to the university. Well, if Torquemada was nowhere to be seen, he's probably still breathing, and that's Elena's main concern. Maybe it is a victory. That is, unless Mountjoy encountered something. Jesus. I hope not. If anything happens to him, it's going to be me bearing the blame.

Here we are. Grab a stack of newspapers. I'm not sleepy and I don't have a headache. Maybe vintage champagne is the answer to my problem. At least it would be an elegant way to go.

"Sir, they just dropped off the latest edition of the Daily Mail. Would you like that one as well?"

"Yes. Please." I slip it under the pile and hustle to catch the train. Boring. Boring. Bored. Let's see what the Daily Mail has to offer. "Oh, my God!"

#### BIZARRE INCIDENT AT WATERLOO STATION

Several travelers on the Bakerloo Line reported a most peculiar incident occurring at Waterloo Station between ten and eleven o'clock, on Saturday night, as they exited from their carriages. While reports differ, there appears to be general agreement that four men were involved in a dispute that resulted in one of them discharging a firearm.

Oh no.

The incident took place at the opposite end of the station from which the travelers exited from their carriages. Witnesses at the scene all agreed they heard shouting in a foreign language from that direction, which one bystander identified it as Italian, and the others as Spanish. Some pushing was observed among three of the gentlemen, two shots were fired in the air, and then something most extraordinary occurred. When the three men separated, a fourth man was seen stark naked in their midst, with both hands clasped over his head, slowly and methodically pirouetting.

Two of the men suddenly started running at a furious pace past the bystanders. One witness reportedly looked towards the end of the station and saw the naked man scamper to retrieve his discarded clothes and push the other man, an elderly gentleman, into the carriage of a newly arrived train. The naked man's momentum carried him and the older man into the carriage just as the doors were closing.

As the train passed by, several witnesses observed the naked man, thought to be in his thirties, dressing hastily, while the elderly gentleman sat bewildered. Witnesses agreed they saw only one person, a woman perhaps in her late fifties, in the car the two men entered. She is said to have been staring at the naked man with what appeared to be a smile on her face.

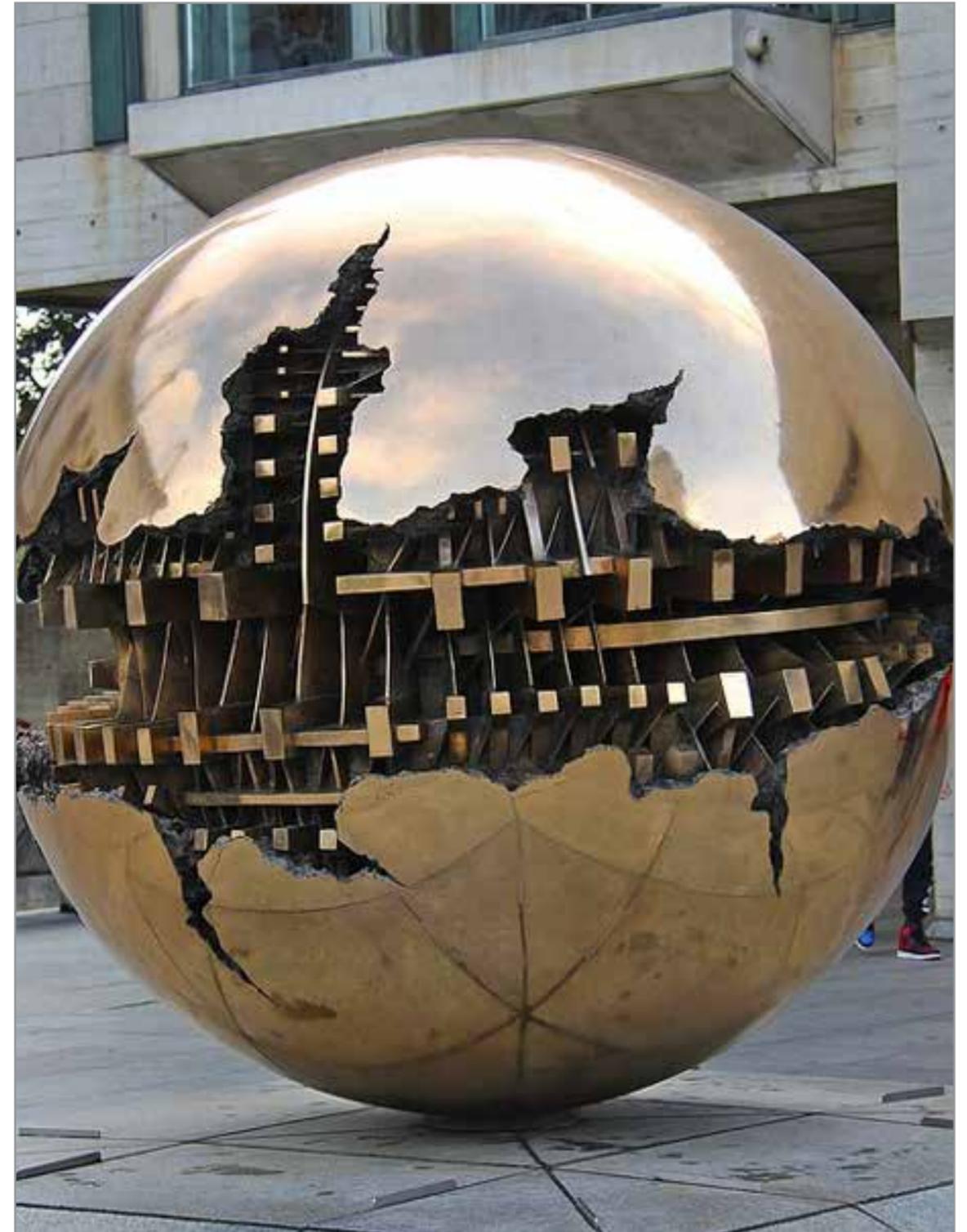
The local constabulary was contacted, and the station was shut down while police officials attempted to locate the bullets allegedly discharged into the roof of the station.

Anyone who has information concerning what transpired at Waterloo Station last night is asked to contact Scotland Yard.

“This has to be Mountjoy. Nobody else is crazy enough to do something like that.”

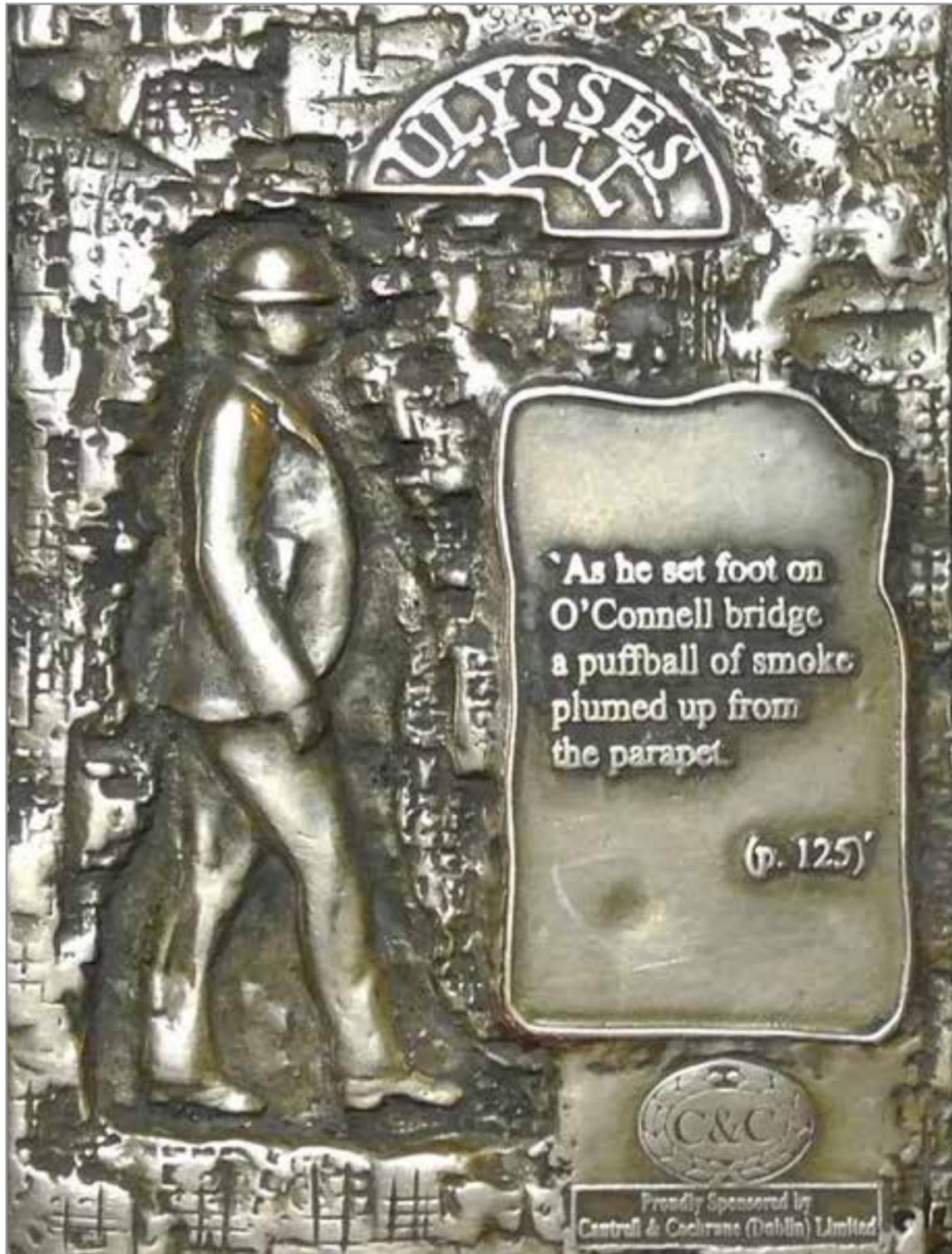
I can imagine the headlines in tomorrow’s tabloids:

MAYHEM IN THE BOWELS OF THE LONDINIUM METROPOLIS  
 PIROUETTING PEDANT’S PENIS PARRIES PERNICIOUS PLOT  
 DANGLING DINGUS DERAILES DESPICABLE DEED  
 WAYWARD WILLY WAGGER WOWS WATERLOO WATCHERS  
 FRISKY FRUMP FINDS FLASHER’S FLUTE FASCINATING



<https://pixabay.com/photos/sphere-dublin-ireland-grunge-3105670/>

Published in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing June 2020



*Aloysius the Great* is a seriocomic tale of an alcoholic professor who becomes resident director of an American study abroad program in England during the 1960s and finds himself on a runaway roller coaster of rebellious students, drugs, sex, liquor, and academic politics. This picaresque novel is a treasure trove for admirers of James Joyce. Its chapters parallel episodes in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Many of its characters come from *Ulysses* and/or individuals significant in Joyce's life. Words and phrases from *Ulysses* are sprinkled harmoniously throughout the text and Joyce *aficionados* are invited to detect vestiges of the master in the excerpt that follows...

*Aloysius the Great* by John Maxwell O'Brien is being published by *Propertius Press* and is due out shortly. <http://www.propertiuspress.com/>.

Grafton Street, Dublin.

## CHAPTER II

As I'm about to leave campus, a car's incessant cranking lures me to an adjacent parking lot. There sits a flustered Elena Delagracia behind the wheel of a hearse-like Cadillac. Is this providential? My blood pressure rises. *Be tactful, Aloysius, or you'll scare the lady off.*

With an engaging smile, I approach her car and tap gently on the glass. Elena looks up, half smiles, and rolls down her window.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm having a little difficulty, Professor Gogarty."

"So, I've noticed. Do you mind if I take a look?"

"Gracias. I beg your pardon—thank you." She fidgets to extricate herself from the driver's seat, exposing black nylon stockings reaching up to a metallic clasp on the thigh. *Mary, star of the sea, pray for us sinners.* I wonder if Elena's aware of her resemblance to Brueghel's *Calypso*?

I slide behind the wheel and notice an unopened letter on the passenger seat addressed to Sra. Elena Delagracia. It's written in the bold hand of a bold man. Someone thinks she's married. Señor Delagracia.

I turn the key and hear a crisp succession of clicks and a barely audible whine. "It sounds like it's your battery or your starter."

"Oh, my."

"I don't have any cables, but if we contact campus security, they'll give you a jump-start."

"Thank you. Will it take long?"

She's more anxious than irritated.

*Carpe diem.*

"Who knows? I'd be happy to drive you home, if you'd like. Just leave your keys here in the car for the security people so they can work on it. It's probably your battery."

"Yes, I'm afraid I'm in a bit of a rush. My son's off from school today and my father's been with him all day. *Papá's* getting on in age now and he tires easily. If you can take me out to Wantagh, my father can drive me to work early tomorrow morning. We live close to the parkway there."

She has a son, but no mention of *Señor Delagracia*.

"Elena, why don't you meet me over in parking lot three? Look for a red Volkswagen convertible. I'll stop by the chemistry office next to the parking lot and call security."

She gathers her things and appears to be unconcerned that I've used her first name.

I'd better take care of business promptly, and get back before she changes her mind.

That took no time. Ahh! There she is, leaning against the car.

"I like your Volkswagen, Professor Gogarty."

"Why, thank you. I call her *Pequeña pelirroja*, my little redhead." A bald-faced lie invented on the spot, but she's smiling.

*Be careful. Don't get too cute. It could backfire on you.*

"Look at the nerve of me, translating Spanish for you. By the way, you speak English beautifully. Did you study it at school?"

Elena settles into the passenger seat. "Yes, I majored in English at the University of Havana."

Her perfume is as subtle and unimposing as her looks are striking and hypnotic. How do I find out more about this exotic creature without being intrusive? What would Alexander do?

*Take an oblique approach.*

"I'll bet your father is quite an interesting man."

"Yes, there's no question about that."

"Is he the one who encouraged you in your schoolwork, or was it your mother?"

"Both did, but especially my father." She pauses momentarily. "He's very well educated."

"Really?"

"He has a bachelor's degree, a law degree, and a PhD."

"My oh my—he is well educated. So, did your father wind up being a lawyer in Cuba?"

"Yes and no. He was a lawyer, that's true, but he did other things."

"Oh?"

Elena pauses again, and then decides to continue. "Under *Batista*, Papá had some governmental responsibilities, and he was also a successful businessman, especially with his marlin and shark factories."

"So, he was a big shot, huh?" I cringe at my trite expression.

"If that means an important person, I guess you could say so. But when Fidel Castro took over, Papá had to leave everything behind and take a boat to Florida in a big hurry. With all his education, the only degree he was able to—is it *salvage*?—was his bachelor's degree from Salamanca. Now he's a substitute teacher of Spanish in a Catholic school out on Long Island."

Count no man happy until he's decidedly dead.

"How about your mother? You said she, too, was from Andalusia, as I recall."

"Actually, my mother's family originally came from Gibraltar. *Mamá* was born there, and then her family moved to Andalusia. She didn't go to college. *Mamá* passed away several years ago."

"Oh. What a shame," I say, while thinking: *At least you had a mother.* "Were you able to take your degree with you?"

"No, I'm afraid not. When I flew to Spain in 1965, Castro's Dirección General de Inteligencia kept it to make sure I'd return."

"The DGI—that's Castro's KGB, isn't it? So, you and your husband were able to escape. Well, thank God."

"Not my husband, he's still in Cuba, where he's a physician—a gastroenterologist. He was supposed to meet us in Spain, but..." Elena stops short.

He never appeared. Did he desert her? How could anyone abandon a woman like Elena? What am I saying? Men abandon goddesses. We're afflicted with the disease of never being satisfied with what we have – especially when it comes to women.

One man's Penelope is another man's Calypso.

"Professor Gogarty, are you quite sure you know where you're going? I've never been this way before."

"Please, call me Aloysius, unless you find the name peculiar. Many people do."

"Aloysius, the patron saint of young Catholics? I'm fond of that name. There's a Spanish—how do you say?—connection there."

Here's a chance to impress her. "Wasn't his mother the Lady of Honor for the wife of King Philip II?"

"Yes, that's true. Queen Isabel. Very good, Profess—oh, sorry—Aloysius," she says with a sheepish but full smile. Elena shows renewed concern for our whereabouts by rotating her head back and forth as we pass rows of pink and blue and yellow houses looking very much alike.

She seems alarmed. Put her at ease.

"Don't worry, I'm taking a shortcut. I know where we're going. Back when I was a college student, I often played basketball around here with my friends and went swimming at Jones Beach. We should be close now. When you see something you recognize, just tell me where to turn."

She points. "There! If you turn right *there*, and follow *that* street to the end, our house is the yellow one on the left. You were right. Your way's much faster at this time of day, but I'll never remember all those turns."

Tell me, Muse, about the man of many turns.

"Aloysius, would you like to stop in and say hello to my family?"

This is promising. I nod and follow her up a cement walkway to the door of her ranch-style house. She leads me into her sparsely furnished lodgings while announcing, "We have a guest."

Her father, who's wearing a handmade silk shirt, rises from a threadbare couch with frayed arms and faded stains. He's a short, stocky man with black glossy hair combed back, bright brown eyes, and a slight hunch to his back. The intensity of his stare and his wrinkled brow make me feel like a reluctant matador facing a bull who's sizing him up.

"Professor Gogarty, this is my father, Dr. Miguel de la Flora. Papá, this is Professor Gogarty from the college. I had some trouble with my car, and he was kind enough to drive me home."

We shake hands and he keeps a firm grip while we're being introduced.

"Professor Gogarty has just become the resident director for our study-abroad program in England. He'll be leaving soon to set things up there and get the program underway."

De la Flora's grip relaxes and his brow unwrinkles. He gestures for me to follow him into his study, which has a small desk with a folding chair behind it. A compact bookcase containing several dozen volumes in English and a Spanish-English dictionary serves as a partition from the living room.

Elena follows behind us, with a kitchen chair for me. She squeezes it into the space available and then leaves. I'm on my own in the lion's den. If you're ever going to get close to Elena, it will have to meet this man's approval.

*Be careful where you tread, Aloysius.*

De la Flora positions himself behind his desk as if it were a judge's bench, and in short order determines my height, weight, age, degrees, marital status, and the fact that I'm untenured at the college. I'm beginning to feel as if I'm courting Torquemada's daughter, and have been summoned before the Inquisition. A low point is reached when the inevitable question about my glasses is raised, and my patented rejoinder fails to evoke even a nod. Why is he so fiercely protective of her? Why not? She may have already been betrayed by one man—Señor Delagracia. De la Flora has quite a few books by Hemingway. I'll try to draw him out on that.

"Sir, what do you think of Ernest Hemingway?"

"He writes a clear English sentence."

"Yes, he certainly does," I say. Not much to go on, but enough to launch me into an impromptu lecture on Hemingway's writings, moving sequentially from his early to his later work. I stop to see how I'm faring, only to discover that de la Flora's beginning to doze off.

"Dr. de la Flora," I say, raising my voice slightly. His left eyebrow twitches. When I increase the volume, he stirs.

*Ask another question before you lose him.*

"I've been going on and on about Hemingway, and you've scarcely said a word. I suspect you might be the true *aficionado* here." I point in the direction of his Hemingway collection. "What do you think? Am I making any sense at all?"

"Of course, you are, Professor Gogarty," he says, "I basically agree with what you've been saying. He meant well. Unfortunately, he drank too much, and I told him so on several occasions."

I gulp. "You knew him?"

"Ernesto and I used to have lunch together at the Floridita in Havana, and I sometimes agreed to go to the Tropicana with him, although that was not—how do you say it?—my cup of tea."

Here I am lecturing her father on Hemingway, when he knew the man. Hopefully, he's too groggy to remember what I've said.

"I have been a bad host," de la Flora says in an apologetic tone. "Would you like something to drink?"

*Watch your step.*

"Oh no," I say, lifting both hands in protest. "Not for me, sir, but thank you."

"Professor Gogarty, you mentioned *The Old Man and the Sea*, no?" Now fully awake, he points at the book, and I raise my eyebrows and nod.

"Well, you see, Ernesto needed to know more about marlin fishing to write that book. He asked me if he could borrow Felipe, my best marlin fisherman, to teach him the particulars. He was grateful. He should've been. No Felipe, no book. And that's the one that landed him the big fish—the Nobel Prize, eh?" He chuckles. "Maybe Felipe should've been awarded that prize. I'll tell you one thing. If he had been, Felipe would've mentioned Ernesto in his acceptance speech, but Ernesto never said a word about Felipe."

Her father leans forward and stuns me when he whispers, "My daughter's husband passed away a few years ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." He's dead? That's not what Elena said. Is this wishful thinking on Torquemada's part or an item on his agenda?

He glances over my shoulder toward the door. I turn to see Elena's son standing at the entrance to the makeshift study. "*Abuelo*," he calls.

De la Flora gets up and escorts us all into the living room proper. There he introduces me to Miguelito. The boy is about seven years old. His hair is red with a black border at the base of his neck, and both his eyes are avocado green. Miguelito's complexion is much darker than Elena's. He's a sturdy young lad who moves with athletic fluidity.

Miguelito's the same age my son would've been if Deborah had had him. I urged her to do something about the pregnancy because I was afraid that she might die in childbirth, like my mother. I shouldn't have interfered. The choice was hers. Where is she now? Where is he now?

The boy's skeptical of me at first, but I soon have him giggling at my comical faces. De la Flora observes me benignly, but he's fading fast. It's time to go.

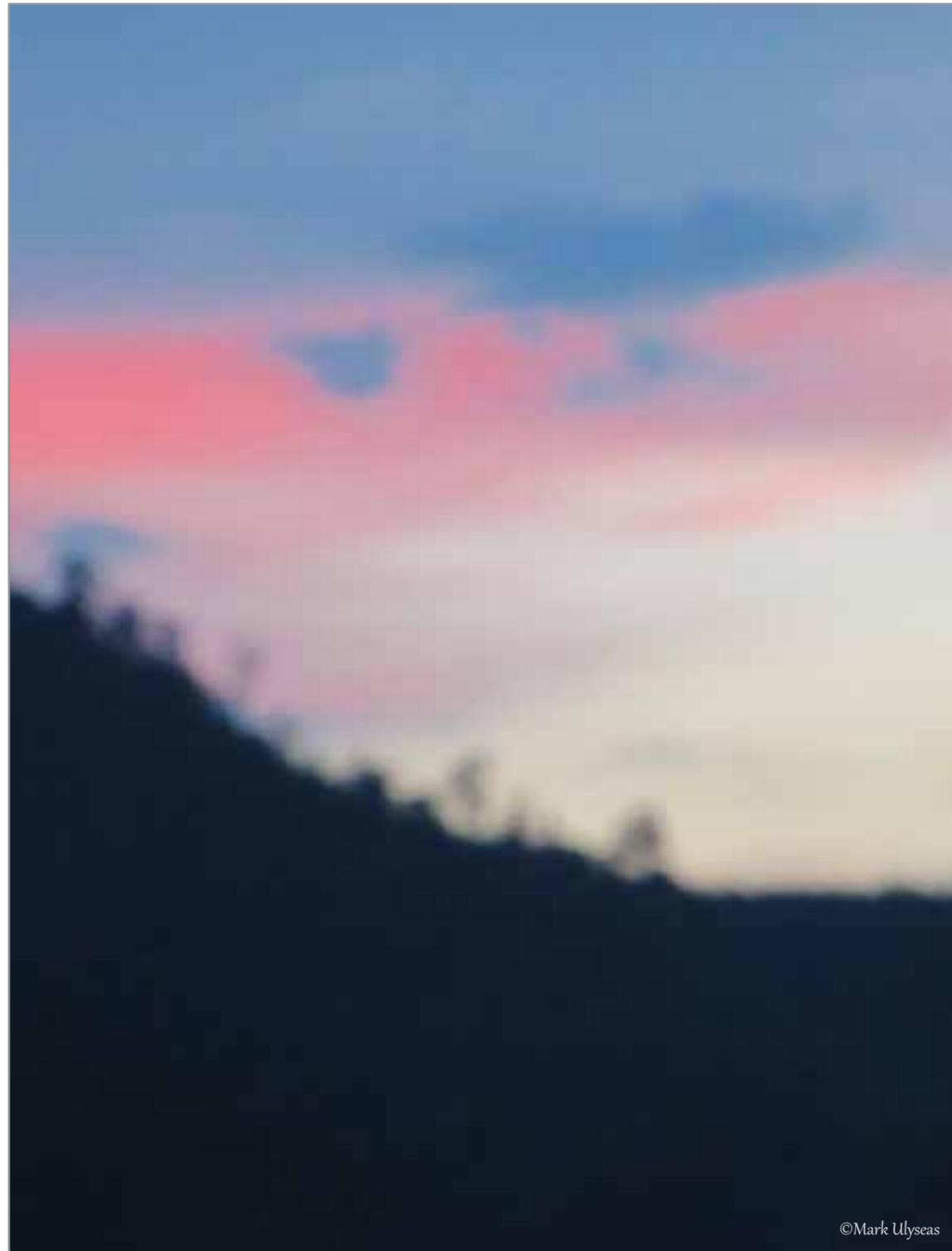
In the midst of cordial farewells at the doorway, Elena sends a chill up my spine by lightly stroking my brow and gazing at me affectionately.

"Ahh," is all she says. It's enough.

This is encouraging, but I'll be on my way in a week. How can I court Elena with an ocean separating us? Will Torquemada allow it? How about Señor Delagracia? What if he shows up?

One man's Calypso is another man's Penelope.

Published in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing, Volume Two, December 2020.



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## HAIKU: A BAKER'S DOZEN

### **Freedom**

To say what I please  
Without being pilloried  
If one disagrees

### **Genre**

Haiku...no rhyme?  
Break that tacit rule... you  
Do so all the time

### **Birth**

Rosy-fingered dawn  
Flashing crimson bearing hope  
A new day is born

### **Mom**

Always the other  
Endless love for thee and thine  
Forsaking mother

### **Dad**

Never did falter  
Struck dumb about love...but  
The Rock of Gibraltar

Dawn. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

HAIKU: A BAKER'S DOZEN *contd...*

**Visage**

It's Ireland's map  
They'd all say of my freckled face  
I'd pull down my cap

**Me**

Barely half as smart  
As I pretend to be...but  
Brilliant at the part

**Children**

Miniature me  
Along with words my path to  
Immortality

**Art and Neurosis**

The odd eye yields art  
We stop...stare...and marvel  
At a world apart

**Revelation**

Unpainted picture  
In my window...more profound  
Than Holy Scripture

**Ambivalence**

Both Jekyll and Hyde  
Peering back from my mirror  
Who'd like to guide?

**Home**

Castle and coffin  
Bungalow...bed...bar...and bier  
I couldn't stop loffin

**Death**

Ashes to ashes  
Mud to mud...and in between  
A few bright flashes

John Maxwell O'Brien is an emeritus professor of history (Queens College, CUNY) who has written numerous articles on ancient history, medieval history, and the history of alcoholism. His best-selling biography, *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (Routledge), has been translated into Greek and Italian, and he authored the article on alcoholism in the Oxford Classical Dictionary. Professor O'Brien's second life has been devoted to his first love, creative writing, and he has published a variety of poems and short stories in literary journals. His debut novel, *Aloysius the Great* (Propertius Press), published on Bloomsday this year and brimming with Joycean allusions, has been greeted with rave reviews on Amazon (where it can be purchased) and in Goodreads. Of late the professor says he thinks he has discovered his poetic métier in the haiku.

Published in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing January 2021

## HAIKU: POEMS PENNYEACH

### Tunnel

Light...a holy grail  
Trudge on...a magic potion  
Lifts this grim grey veil

### Silence

Feel that inner coil  
Once apart from wired voices  
And...mundane turmoil

### Invisible

Much of me unseen  
Fearful embers burn below  
A mask so serene

### Dusk

Dim light in the sky  
Tolling the knell...my eclipse  
As each dusk draws nigh

### Joy

Slowly...face...to...face  
Folded...into...this...odd ...world's  
Mystical embrace



©Mark Ulyseas

Bali. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

HAIKU: POEMS PENNYEACH *contd...***Melancholia**

Deep?...shoal?...ne'er pretty  
Melancholy?...or...could...it...  
Be... just...self-pity

**Unlucky**

Poor me...again...why?  
Alas...it's all yellow...seen  
Through...my jaundiced eye

**Temps perdu**

To glance...but...not stare  
At our past stains...lest we the  
Here and now... impair

**Thyestean Feast**

Bittersweet...but...mine  
I feed...on...my...tasty heart  
As if it were thine

**Immaculate Misconception**

Pure...an ideal  
Or...weapon...to...wield...against  
Them...with pious zeal

**Paris**

A scribbler's haven  
Lens to see oneself...whether  
Lackey or maven

**Perfection**

O hateful error!  
Piercing the myth...and...stirring  
Such inner terror

**Success**

Measured when you die  
Not by fame or money...but  
Tears of those who cry

**Bliss**

A natural state  
Of wonder and delight...soon  
Jaded by one's fate

**Miracles**

Water became wine  
Lazarus winked...and...then...you...  
Placed...your hand...in mine

Published in Live Encounters Poetry & Writing June 2021



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## POEMS HA'PENNY EACH

### Identity

Probing...to...find...me  
Masks...until...I...found...myself  
Now...I'm whole...and...free

### Writing

Loosen...let words flow  
Like crimson leaves ...when autumn  
Winds...do...howl...and,,blow

### Books

Scribble...you...and...me  
Desperate thrusts...we...make...at  
Immortality

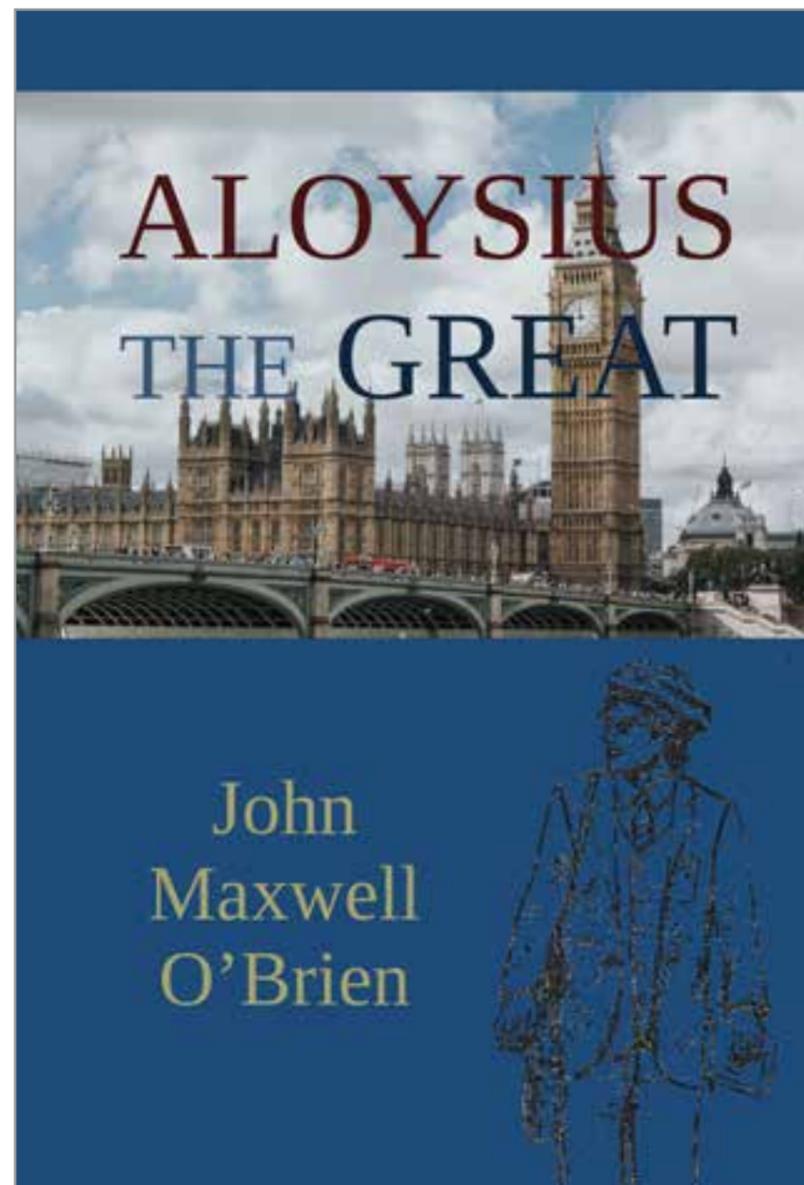
### Shadows Numberless

We come...and...go  
Vestiges at first...then...just  
One...in...a...long...row

Looking through a glass. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Published in Live Encounters Book Reviews August 2020

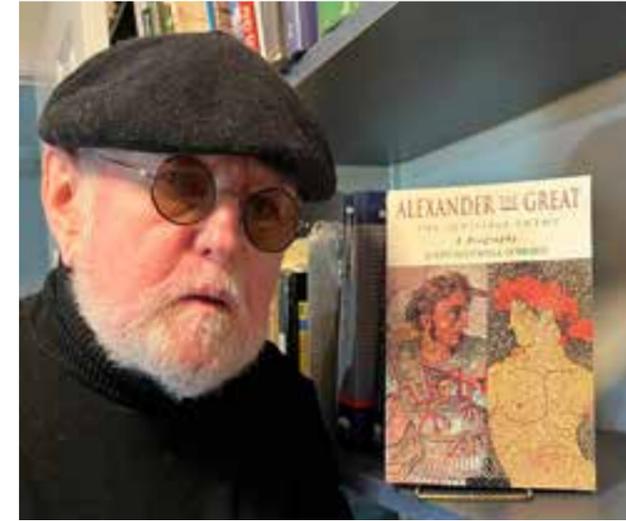
James Walton is published in many anthologies, journals, and newspapers. He is the author of four widely acclaimed collections of poetry. 'The Leviathan's Apprentice', 'Walking Through Fences', 'Unstill Mosaics', and 'Abandoned Soliloquies'. His fifth collection will be released shortly. He was nominated for 'The Best of the Net' 2019.



## JAMES WALTON Review of JOHN MAXWELL O'BRIEN'S *Aloysius The Great*

In 'Aloysius The Great' O'Brien masters the fracas of language, going beyond allusive homily to Joyce. 'Aloysius' exists in its own place, teeming with wit and grace, in a spellbinding exploration of the faults in clay of which we are cast. Joyce fans will no doubt discover hours of joy making links and sorting through the aspects of the novel which provides rich grounds of reference for analysis; however, the parallels have their own rhythm and the content of another time, in which a traveling academic becomes embroiled. Comedy is used as an affirmation that the loose cannon of a soul is universally constrained, where the choices are made for us, as much as by us. There may be drugs, sex, alcohol, and laughter, as an exiled journeyman, caught in the travail of the mystery of tenure meanders waywardly from crisis to crisis in 1960's Britain, but the set pieces intersect the idiom of Ulysses, making fresh again themes and style which established the modern novel. Our hero is not the best of men; he is the mesh of weaknesses that make for everyman. As with Joyce, a book to be wrestled with, a book to be fought over, but always on its own terms, and in its own outstanding quality.

ebook: \$7.49 (US) Paperback: \$22.99 (US) In the continental United States delivery directly from the publisher is free. Simply go to <http://bit.ly/AloysiusTheGreat> and order. Outside the United States? For the paperback (\$22.99) go to <http://bit.ly/AloysiusTheGreat> and order. Then go to [merchant@propertiuspress.com](mailto:merchant@propertiuspress.com) enter the information, and this enables the publisher to get a very reasonable delivery price from a distributor closer to you. You will receive a separate invoice from the publisher after you select your mode of delivery.



John Maxwell O'Brien is an Emeritus Professor of History at Queens College (CUNY) and his best-selling biography *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* has been translated in Greek and Italian. He has also published numerous poems and articles on Alexander as well the history of alcoholism, and a novel entitled *Aloysius the Great*.

He served as editor and historical advisor for the work represented here.

Published in *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing Volume One* December 2021

*Extract from*  
**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**  
*A Lyrical Biography*

*Alexander the Great: A Lyrical Biography* (with illustrations) consists of an epic poem portraying Alexander's life written for people of all ages from the curious teenager to the venerable student of life.

The poem is accompanied by classical and contemporary illustrations of Alexander, his family, and significant events in the Macedonian conqueror's career.

It is designed to stimulate your appetite for more information about Alexander.

It will be published by Marquette Books on July 20th 2022, his 2,377th birthday.

Book available at:

<https://www.amazon.com/Alexander-Great-Biography-Christine-OBrien/dp/1732719748>

Christine O'Brien holds an Honors degree in Classical Civilization from Boston College and has just embarked on her literary career. The stanzas below are taken from a poem which is her creation.



The Birth of Alexander from a 15th century miniature in the Musée de Petit Palais.

*Extract from*  
**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**  
*A Lyrical Biography*

Twenty days into July  
 Three fifty-six BC  
 A boy of royal blood was birthed  
 Unto history

\*

His father's name was Philip  
 Reigning King of Macedon  
 His mother was Olympias  
 And he her only son

\*

The seers prophesied this child  
 To be a great commander  
 Superlatives were always used  
 Describing Alexander

\*

Less than average height he stood  
 One brown eye the other blue  
 But all that was foreseen for him  
 Was destined to ring true

\*

In our histories we have  
 But fifty who are "Great"  
 And being first amongst this list  
 Was Alexander's fate



Alexander Mosaic (detail), House of the Faun, Pompeii, circa 100 BC.  
 Credit: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander\\_the\\_Great\\_mosaic.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alexander_the_Great_mosaic.jpg)

*Extract from*  
**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**  
*A Lyrical Biography ...contd*

And so I beckon to my Muse  
 Please whisper in my ear  
 A melic tale of peerlessness  
 I've yearned so long to hear

\*

His life was filled with struggle  
 Almost from the very start  
 His parents ever colorful  
 Were culpable in part

\*

More blessed with name and privilege  
 Than any child could be  
 He felt the pressures early on  
 Of meritocracy

\*

His mother was a brilliant soul  
 Who came from royalty  
 Bringing him his greatest gift  
 Eternal loyalty

\*

Tough as any man  
 Walking on this earth  
 Olympias was his sentinel  
 From the moment of his birth



Olympias and Alexander drawn by the contemporary artist Doug Jamieson.  
©Doug Jamieson.

*Extract from*  
**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**  
*A Lyrical Biography ...contd*

A devotee of Bacchus  
She entwined herself with snakes  
Enough to ward off enemies  
For both of their sakes

\*

Descended from Achilles  
Greatest hero of the Greeks  
Expecting no less of her son  
In laurels that he seeks

\*

When he left for Asia  
She said without demur  
Be worthy of divine heritage  
About which you can be sure

\*

His father was a warrior  
And thus not often home  
All across his conquered lands  
The king would often roam

\*

Philip's plan was first to quell  
The Greeks and those up north  
Reluctantly most states succumbed  
An Hellenic League sprung forth



Philip II and Alexander drawn by the contemporary artist Doug Jamieson.  
©Doug Jamieson.

*Extract from*  
**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**  
*A Lyrical Biography ...contd*

This league was just a power tool  
To keep the Greeks at bay  
With everything at home secured  
He'd need no longer stay

\*

For Philip had a glorious dream  
To conquer Asia Minor  
Greece was a sweet victory  
But Asia even finer

\*

Little Alexander knew  
The victories of his dad  
But Philip's countless triumphs  
Rarely made him glad

\*

If all Alexander wanted  
Was the power without merit  
All he'd have to do is wait  
And soon he would inherit

\*

But this was just the problem  
In Alexander's eyes  
To him a soul without a dream  
Inevitably dies

2010 - 2022



POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH

AUGUST 2022

BACKGROUND COVER ARTWORK BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE