

Ghosts from the Recent Past: Poem Films

Cherishing for Beginners

by Sarah Clancy

Notes on the poem, *Cherishing for Beginners*, by poet Sarah Clancy

- The poem's title, "Cherishing for Beginners," refers to the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. This document was drawn up by the leaders of Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, an armed uprising aimed at overthrowing British colonial power in Ireland. While this "rising" failed, a repressive overreaction by the British state, which saw most of the leaders executed, generated widespread support for the Irish cause. This put the Irish people on a path to secure sovereign independence for what is now the Republic of Ireland. "Cherishing" references the proclamation's promise to "cherish all the children of the nation equally."
- "Ranchers" is a conception of a core aspect of the Republic of Ireland's economy put forward by researcher and educator Conor McCabe. The term indicates the propensity towards dealing and making swift deals as a cornerstone of economic policy, as opposed to production and investment, et al. McCabe's book *Sins of the Father* goes into depth on this and other cultural Irish economic practices.
- "Guards" is a colloquial way of referring to An Garda Síochána, the Irish Republic's police force.
- The Rose of Tralee is a highly popular competition for the international community of Irish women. Although superficially like a beauty pageant along the lines of Miss World, its focus is on personality and accomplishments.
- "The goal and the point and the foul" indicates the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), an organisation for the suite of traditional Irish field sports that are hugely popular in Ireland. The GAA has a political and cultural hold on Ireland; as an example, "Notably 54% of all men surveyed entering local government held a role in a sporting organisation, including the GAA, compared to 23% of women. The role of the GAA has long been assumed as a central recruitment pool and support network for male politicians.¹⁹" [15176 NWCI Research Report WEB.pdf](#)
- "Priest's dirty sheets" refers to two issues. The Magdalene Laundries were residential institutions that functioned as commercial laundries, staffed by supposedly wayward women incarcerated there with the complicity of local government, "guards," and the Church. The term also refers metaphorically to the prevalence of child abusers in the Irish Catholic Church and to the Church's mishandling of abuse accusations.
- The "IFSC" indicates the Irish Financial Services Centre, an area of Dublin often referred to as the Wild West of international finance. The "laundries" here refer to money laundering.
- The "heartbeat" section refers to Irish laws on women's reproductive rights. In 1983, a referendum was passed that guaranteed an equal right to life for the unborn, ensuring that women did not have access to abortion except under threat to the life of the pregnant woman. This provision was repealed in a 2018 referendum, but many women of the poet's generation experienced their whole reproductive lifespans under this provision. [More at the Irish Times.](#)

- “Graves” refers to the discovery of mass graves at a Tuam Mother and Baby Home. “Undisclosed wastelands” describe the practice of burying stillborn or unbaptised babies in *cillíní*: abandoned, unconsecrated places apart from family graves and religious graveyards. [More on Mother and Baby Homes at BBC.](#)
- “Travelling people”—also known as Travellers or Mincéirs—are a traditionally nomadic ethnic minority group indigenous to Ireland, numbering fewer than 40,000 people. They experience severe discrimination within Irish society.
- Fr (Father) Peter McVerry is a well-known priest and advocate for those experiencing homelessness. Although nominally celebrated and honoured with public praise, his public critiques of the political root causes of Ireland’s housing crisis are often ignored because they challenge conventional politics.
- “TDs” are Teachtaí Dalá, national-level politicians elected to the lower house of Ireland’s parliament. Elected by area, they are often highly engaged in local issues.
- The “crowd in Listowel” refers to a famous legal case where a queue of people formed in court to shake hands with a convicted rapist. [More from the Independent.](#)
- “Irish Water” is a reference to one of the largest series of protests seen in Ireland in recent years. During severe austerity, large sectors of the population successfully mobilised against the introduction of charges for domestic use of water by newly established national utility Irish Water. As water is abundant in Ireland, the utility was seen as an attempt to privatise water supply and customer data.
- “Coffin ships” were the boats that carried Irish emigrants to the US, Canada, and elsewhere during the Great Famine, a catastrophe of the 1840s during which 25% of Ireland’s population either died or emigrated. Conditions on board were so severe that the boats became known by the macabre nickname.
- “Lack of gay teachers” refers to the Catholic Church’s management of and influence over the majority of Ireland’s primary and secondary public schools. These schools often require a Catholic ethos as a criterion for employment, resulting in an almost complete absence of “out” LGBTQ teachers. [More at the Irish Times.](#)
- “Women’s place in the home” refers to article 41.2.1 of the Irish constitution: “In particular, the state recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”
- “Then cut their allowances” indicates a 2015 policy measure introduced by Joan Burton, then Ireland’s Tánaiste or deputy state head, that restricted the single parent welfare allowance to those with children under seven years old.
- “Jobstown” refers to the Jobstown protest, a public demonstration that blocked a public road, including the vehicles of two Irish politicians. Six protesters were charged with false imprisonment. The reference points to the fact that those from the poorest areas in Ireland experience the most heavy-handed policing and legal sanctions.
- “Dev” is Éamon de Valera, a 1916 Rising leader who later became Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and President of Ireland; he is one of the architects of the Irish constitution and a guardian of the Catholic nature of the Irish state. “Pearse” is Patrick or Pádraic Pearse, another 1916 leader. James Connolly was an Irish Republican Socialist from the left wing of the movement that organised the 1916 rising. Pearse and Connolly were both signatories to the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, from which the poem’s title is drawn.