

STONEYPATTER RIVER WALKS



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EXCERPTS:

ARBOUR HILL

Once upon a time, Arbour Hill lived up to its name. It was all covered over with woods and orchards, later becoming a covering itself for a tunnel that ran from the military hospital to the prison, to the barracks. Beneath Dublin lie countless tunnels and channels, both apocryphal and actual. The city is fractured into a thousand pieces by these quiet conduits and rests uneasily on a delicate surface of clay, tar and concrete.

As we cross over one of the five royal roads of Ireland—Bóthar na gCloch, the stony road—we also cross the Oxmantown Stream on the final leg of its journey to meet the Liffey, where the two will merge and drown in one another. We are passing through a cloud of static electricity that radiates from the water running below; layers of information and experience recorded in space and time reform in the psyche, like figures in television snow. Here they are replayed in each passing mind, eternally. The river projects and absorbs impressions; sometimes it grows thick and black with sorrows, almost congealing beneath us, yet never failing to convey our secrets to the sea where they will be irrevocably dispersed.

As we pass above the Oxmantown Stream we hear in its name an echo: Ostman's town, Houstmanebi, Ostmanby, Oustmanton, Oestmantown. The men who came from the east...



BROADSTONE

Here, we will walk and talk parallel to the Bradoge, upstream and therefore backwards in time. To quote Michel Serres, “The past, the present, the future, the dawn of appearance and death, tenacious illusions, are only the declinations of matter. They decline and are declined like the tenses of a verb, a word made up of atom-letters”.

The stream pours forth, glossolalically, yet we move upwards and against its grain towards the Broad Stone that one served as its crossing point. And in doing so we might notice the word Broadstone thickening; moving from abstract place name to tangible container of former realities. Yet the stone itself becomes foamy and insubstantial, disappearing into the very thing to which it lends its name.

This reminds me of a stone that I once encountered on the shore of a lake. The water had been at it—it was limestone so it wasn’t hard—and had transformed the calcium carbonate into an image of itself. All of the rock’s solidity had melted and become light, flowing waveforms that mirrored the lake, a giant mirror in its own right. In contemplating the thick space of the tenacious stone, our brains are similarly petrified and slam against its impassive walls. But the collision is harmonious and we sing noisily together like two lost Orpheus heads into the abyss. Only the river can comprehend this crackle of stochastic residue that gathers and sediments above its course, dustily scattered like stars in the sky.

HALSTON STREET

“The mechanism of long habit brought him round the corner to the door of the Salmon House... [Inside], an honest but sad-looking person with a flaxen wig, and a fat, florid face- placing his hand in the breast of his red plush waistcoat, and throwing himself back in his chair, struck up a dismal tune, with a certain character of psalmody in it, the clerk's ear was charmed for a moment, and he glanced on the singer and sipped some punch; and the ballad, rude and almost rhymeless, which he chanted had an undefined and unpleasant fascination for Irons. It was thus...

‘Up through the wather your secret rises;
The stones won't keep it, and it lifts the mould,
An' it tracks your footsteps, and yoar fun surprises
An' it sits at the fire beside you black and cowld.
At prayers, at dances, or at wake or hurling;
At fair, or funeral, or where you may;
At your going out, and at your returning,
‘Tis I'll be with you to your dying day.’”

The House by the Churchyard, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, 1863



QUEEN STREET

We recall to life the great lung of the city, the Faire-Greene of Ostmanstowne.

In times gone by this place was famed for its vast Oak forests. The Celts would hollow out these ancient trees as Todtenbaum (death trees): caskets for their deceased which they would abandon to the river's current.

As Gaston Bachelard puts it: they were the "corpse's vegetable double; the living devouring sarcophagus." Originally used to describe a kind of tomb made out of limestone that was thought to speed decomposition, the word sarcophagus literally means flesh-eating.

Perhaps we should not forget that Dublin rests on a bedrock of Calp limestone, with the deepest trench running directly under Broadstone marking the pre-glacial course of the Liffey. *Lithos-sarcophagus*: flesh-eating stone. Deep metamorphic groans in the city's belly tell us of its hunger while streams trickle like saliva along its face.



“To leave is to die a little.’ To die is truly to leave, and no one leaves well, courageously, cleanly, except by following the current, the flow of the wide river.”

Water and Dreams, Gaston Bachelard (translation) 1999

