Dave Lordan

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ANTIPOPE

For The Tuam Babies
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For The Tuam Babies

Nameless in life
we died without names
because without a name
we couldn’t live
and without a life
we couldn’t die
and if we didn’t die
we weren’t killed
and if we weren’t killed
no-one killed us
and if no-one killed us
there are no killers
and if there are no killers
then no-one can lie
about the lives
we didn’t live
and the deaths
we didn’t die

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Watch the online video here.
Definition of A Runner

Do you know what A Runner is in Ireland, where I’m from, in the year that I was born? A Runner is what the other children call a child, a boy or a girl, who keeps trying to run away from the institution where they are being held prisoner by priests or by nuns or by ‘brothers’.

I found out what A Runner was at a gathering of artists and surviving survivors of clerical child abuse in our National College of Art and Design last year. We were all there at the invitation of the poet and performance artist Lisamarie Johnson to talk to each other about art and survival, art and memory, art and redemption.

About a lot of stuff I don’t really honestly believe in.
During our conversation I asked the table’s length of surviving survivors some questions that have perplexed me for a very long time: Why has nobody taken revenge? Why is it none of you have never barehandedly slaughtered a priest or a nun or a brother? Or even arsened a convent or church? That more clerics have not been torn to pieces by the adults of the children they abused is, for me, the great conundrum of modern Irish history, of modern Irish spirituality, of modern Irish philosophy, of modern Irish culture and identity. Of modern Irish poetry.

I think the surviving survivors had been expecting these questions, or they had been asked them many times before by friends and relatives, or these questions were so at home in their own minds that the answer came automatically and simultaneously from the half-dozen of them: Because we are still afraid, they all said. Because the terror takes root so deep down inside you when you are small and it grafts itself to your bones and it splices itself into your cells and it grows as you grow; although it always grows faster than you it always weighs more, is always stronger, always taller than you are, is always there, in a hood and habit, towering over you, its big fists hammering down like a Brother’s.

The surviving survivors then started to talk about another man, a regular of their group, who had not turned up at our meeting though he had promised the others to come. I am going to call the missing man Paddy. Paddy had not been well recently, not since, on Westland Row, he had spotted a priest who had been one of the chief torturers of his childhood. Bumping in to that old sadist had brought an awful lot up for Paddy; all the fear, all the rage, all the hurt, all the despair.
This absent Paddy had been A Runner
the surviving survivors told me.
What’s A Runner? I asked. And they told.
Paddy got caught every time he ran.
Paddy would be half way up the high wall,
(all these theologised borstals had high, blank walls)
or three quarters of the way up,
or struggling to the top and nearly over it,
and a Brother of Christ would catch him by the leg
and yank him back down. Paddy always got caught.
The Brothers had a special way of punishing A Runner
in this vile prison for the innocent. They broke the child’s bone
with a good clatter of a hurley stick,
a weathered one kept handy for the job.
Often it was a wrist they broke,
sometimes an ankle. To make the children crawl. To make them beg.
To make them think twice about attempting to run away again.

But Paddy never stopped trying to run, no matter how many times
his wrist or his ankle got broke.
Freedom was a-beckoning just beyond that wall.
Freedom to be a child like the other children.
Paddy heard laughing and jousting just beyond that wall.
If he could only just make it over the once
Paddy thought he’d have a chance to laugh and play along.
He was that innocent. He was that holy.
He was that much of A Runner,
You had to run away a few times to
get the name of A Runner. You had to show repeatedly
that your desire for freedom was greater than
the fear of broken bones, or of dying.
The clerics often killed children in those places.
They killed them for hate and for rage and they killed them for pleasure.
They killed them with savage beatings
and they buried them hurriedly in unmarked graves
and the Guards ignored it
and the doctor signed the death certificate as accident
and that was that: covered up. Forgotten.
A Runner: the most noble title of my nation. 
So much more than Taoiseach, or President, or Saoi. 
But we have never been a nation. 
Our nation died in 1923 at Ballyseedy. 
Swift saw us coming: a nation of bonechewers, 
a nation that dines on the bones of poor children. 
Paddy’s aged a lot, the surviving survivors were telling me, 
since he had the misfortune to run in to that toxic old goon of a priest – still in his frock and all. 
He doesn’t come to meetings or take part in social activities with the other surviving survivors like he used to anymore. 
He stays in his bedsit talking to himself because he can’t run away from himself. 
Cowering in his bedsit: the cherished one of all the group, 
totem of the uncrushable will to be free against all odds, 
Paddy the Runner: a shivering snivelling child in his fifties behind four blank walls afraid to try climbing over in case he gets caught.
Nightmare Pastoral

It is a little known lie, too absurd to be considered a rumour, that the late South American writer, Robert Bolano, spent a week on vacation in a remote but unidentified west of Ireland village in 1969 on his way from a riot in Mexico to a riot in Paris.

In the often unfathomable code of the young poet, later novelist’s, diaries the unknown village is referred to as ‘Ballylonely’ or, two or three times, as ‘Baloney’.

On the day every screen in the world shows the US stick a flag in the moon over and over Bolano gets destroyed along with all the local gawkers in a pub and general store the writer disguises as 'Paddy’s'.

Later that night, fitfully asleep in unnamed and unfamiliar lodgings, he has a terrible dream which he scribbles out in a feverish rush upon waking.

In the dream two pissed priests are raping a nine year old girl up a boreen (he says ‘grassy lane’) in the back of a van not too far from a petrol station.

When they have done with the rape they strangle and dump her out the back door and drive off, stopping for petrol
and cigarettes.
The two guards—he calls them cops—who lead the investigation that follows are about to move in and arrest one of the priests when they are told in no uncertain terms by the powers that be to close the case and forget all about it. The two priests are hauled in by the bishop whom Bolano describes, in the indecipherable language of dreams, as having a face like a deck of cards. The bishop orders them offstage to missions in remotest Africa with the ringing admonition to “bring the lord’s word as well as his wrath to the savages”. Next morning, back in Paddy’s, Bolano describes his nightmare to a pair of local sages nursing post-moon-landing cures at the counter. ‘Bad Pint you were after’ says one. A diagnosis confirmed by his friend: 'Bad pint. The last of the barrel. The mindbending dregs.’ (This last phrase, hardly Irish, Bolano draws a line under.) A hot toddy was all that he wanted to settle his nerves. ‘Teddy?’ says the Latino, mishearing. ‘Whiskey, that is’ said Paddy, a bit of a know-all, from his leather throne behind the counter:
'I'll put on the kettle.  
First one's the house's'.  
'He means it's free'  
translated one of the sages  
'as a bird' said the other,  
'a little bird  
in an endless wood  
in the middle of winter.'  
Then, writes Bolano,  
still paralytic at this stage  
no doubt or otherwise  
out of his mind,  
the two seers and Paddy the vintner  
started whistling not like  
birds of paradise or swallows  
or like starlings or even like crows  
but like vultures.'  
Bolano drank the hot whiskey, a double.  
Then another. That day he ends up getting  
very very drunk  
and, so he tells it,  
arrested  
for his own safety  
and to preserve public order.  
This is the kind of thing  
he would later go on  
to write about.

(Watch a live performance of Nightmare Pastoral here)
Catechism - THIS IS A CATHOLIC COUNTRY

Q: Why were a hundred thousand children abused?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why did the abusers get away with it?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why did the people of the country, to their as yet unpurged disgrace, let the abusers get away with it?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why are LBGTQ’s still beaten up on our streets, and why are they still afraid to hold hands on most of our streets, and why are so many young LBGTQ’s driven to self-hatred and suicide, and why do LBGTQ’s still not have their equal rights?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why did Patrick Kavanagh die of blinding alcohol instead of visionary ecstasy and why did he end up writing prayers instead of poetry?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why did Joyce and Beckett and all our twentieth century genius leave?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why are there sado-masochistic images of semi-naked crucifixions hanging still in most of our schools, branding torture and terror and body-hate and sexual sickness into the brains of our young?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why are we all so ashamed of our beautiful difference and why are so many of us often afraid to express it?
A: Because this is a catholic country.

Q: Why are you sometimes better off being a pig than a woman or a child in this country?
A: Because this is a catholic country.
Q: Why do we still kill women in our hospitals instead of saving their lives?
A: Because this is a Catholic country.

Q: When will we be stop being slaves in our bodies, our minds, and our souls, and when will we stop abusing and sickening our children and allowing them to be sickened and abused, and when will we be free from the curse of our historical disgrace and when will we stop killing women and beating up LBGTQ’s and all of the beautifully variant, and when will we stop writing prayers instead of poetry?

A: When this is no longer a catholic country.

(Watch a live performance of A Catholic Country here)
Monsignor,
I remember you
The way you strode into our classroom
Your mouth full of tombstones,
Your thin lips spouting the grave’s punishments.

Death strode in beside you with a icy wind
And our young limbs stiffened
As we felt the corpse’s grip within ourselves.

One grey afternoon
Or another
You asked us all for news
And I stuck up my hand
And told in all sincerity
How in my room at night
I saw a statue of the Virgin
Filling up with light.

You scowled
And said what I had seen
Was nothing but a childish dream
Impossible!
Impossible!
You said.

I was nine years old and full of talk
And knowing that I had been awake,

Knowing it was vision and not dream,
Knowing it was no lie & no mistake,

I told again what I had seen -
The truth of light in a plastic queen.

A liar! I was
A blasted little liar’s what you said
And whacked a wooden ruler
Off the back of my head
And whacked again.

A liar! A liar! you said.

Monsignor,
I’m still here to peddle dirt.
You’re ten years rotting in the ground,
Ten years crumbling into earth.
I hope you found your mouldy god
But guess you’re mostly in the sod.

Imagination knows no law.
Vision’s way cannot be barred.
The day after you struck me,
I pissed in the churchyard.

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(Watch my 2017 live tour video, Discover Ireland here)
I met a nun today at an exhibition in a workhouse in Birr

not a fake or a phantasmagoric nun but a real one a real nun

telling me and Aidan, my musician bud, that the workhouse system was set up during the famine by the british occupiers and handed later on to the Roman ones way back in the blight age 'in order to deal with the problem of poverty'.

She didn't like it much when I referred to the church as 'the Romans'

& when I started to rant about shaven heads and iron rods and leather belts and rape and unmarked graves and all the countless tortures inflicted on the children of the poor by the Romans in their workhouses 'in order to deal with the problem of poverty'

She got riled and asked me for my sources

and when I said my sources were the words of abused children I had read about and met she called those children liars

She did. She actually said: 'What do children do only lie?’
Going on to say that no doubt some bad things happened but there needed to be 'balance'.

I said the only way to ‘balance’ a dead or injured child was with a knife in the eye.

I said the only ‘balance’ that didn’t spit on the grave of these oppressed infants was the ‘balance’ of revenge.

I asked her if she believed in Transubstantiation and she did. I asked her then how someone who believes in drinking blood and eating flesh of a sunday, I asked her how a fucking cannibal and a vampire like her could talk to anyone about their ‘sources’? She walked away and I knew that I had won right there and right then at that contemporary exhibition in a workhouse in Birr against that rotting old hypocritical old wanker of a nun.
Dark Nun
(For those who had their head shaved)

Dark Nun has no face,
only darkness
under her black hood.

Her breath sows plague
In the wind.

She carries axes and hooks
in the folds of her robes.

She is black ice
on a country road near a gate.

She is a last injection
at the gable end of a housing estate.

She is a signature on a
depортation order.

She is a manhole purposely
left open on a farm.

She is a sniper’s bullet fired
out of spite.

She is a home made grenade thrown
at a schoolyard.

She is a flat line on a
blank screen
in the children’s ward.

Dark Nun is worse
than a vampire.
She is a Princess in Limbo.
What I am seeing

What am I seeing now when I look at a tree standing alone in the middle of a country field?

Not the strength to bend straight in the terrible weather. Not an indomitable will to live.

Now I am seeing the absent forest, the undecided emptiness, the cut down things.
A THANK YOU NOTE FROM DAVE LORDAN

Thank for reading my poems. I wish I lived in an Ireland where it was possible to write about happier things, but until the people are free the poet must stay chained alongside them, or else be just another dancing monkey for the rulers of our world.

Irish written literature - as opposed to our far superior literature of song & balled - has too often been a mere ceremonial prop for the Irish State. Established Irish poets have too often looked the other way to suit their own advantage. I am trying, along with others, to change this and restore some pride and relevance to the poetic art in Ireland.

I am trying, along with others, to renew and revitalise the old, undying traditions of bardic resistance to the status quo. I am trying to do so in freely accessible modern mediums like video, podcast, performance, livestreaming, & so on.

I want to continue to write poems which are fearlessly on the side of 99%, & continuously call out the war-on-humanity being waged by the 1 per cent that rule over us with such ignorance & cruelty.

Because I am a writer on the side of the people, I am subject to blanket exclusion from the common & official supports available to writers in Ireland. I have not received a state grant for 15 years. Despite being one of Ireland’s best known writers for well over a decade, I have never been interviewed about my work by a national newspaper in Ireland. Funding & mass media coverage for writers in Ireland overwhelmingly goes to middle-class writers with nothing politically challenging to say.

Working-class writers like me rely completely on the support of our readers - and it is only & entirely through that support that I have been able to continue for so long. Thanks so much to every reader who has helped in any way.

If you would like to support my work you can do so for free by doing any or all of the below~:

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