

hold of a corrupt priesthood seemed to be breaking down, the "old ways" being revisited. "Riverdance" and its aftermath, "Riverdance, The Show"¹ seemed to awaken the world to the beauty of Ireland's unique culture and civilization. The *Sean Van Voght*,² the poor, old, British-dominated, victimized, priest-ridden, obsequious Ireland was vanishing, to be replaced by Cathleen ni Houlihan³ a young, vibrant, politically aware, environmentally conscious, and sought-after little island. I spent six months on home ground soaking up the resurgence and returned, energized, to Canada.

The land that I live in and the land that I left are similar. They are both on the 54th parallel, damp, and misty. They are both islands. They have been inhabited since time immemorial. They have their own civilization, language, and spirituality. They have both been pillaged and plundered: Ireland for centuries, Haida Gwaii only since European contact. There the parallels end.

The island people of Haida Gwaii have no say in the future of the island or its resources. Multi-national corporations have tenure over the forest lands. The people have lost the right to fish their home waters and as the *Tuatha de Danaan*, the copper people, were driven from their wild places in Ireland when the iron people came, so too are the lands and people here seeing the death of their wild places, their spirit home.

I am a woman of Ireland. I had to leave all those years ago to find out what it meant. As I age I become fiercer as I witness the destruction of the wild places so necessary for the survival of the human spirit. The passing of the seasons bring less and less migrant birds and the wave of returning salmon is no more that a flip in the water. There is something ancient about this watching and waiting, this anger at the carelessness of our actions. Our Irish education made Macha and Finn and Oisín⁴ live as though it were only yesterday they sang the great plains and battles into being. As I argue and battle and write about the disappearing forests and their resident birds I am reminded of an old Gaelic lament which began "*Cead a deanfamaoid feasda gan admad* (what will we do without wood)"⁵ as the hills and valleys of Ireland were stripped. Perhaps, if I stay a little longer, we might effect some change as the journey continues.

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¹Whelan, Bill, composer. "Riverdance" first performed as a music and dance interlude for the Eurovision Song Contest, Dublin 1992.

²*Sean van Voght* an allegorical name for Ireland meaning "poor old woman"

³Caitilin Ni Uallachain (Catherine, daughter of Holahan) an allegorical name by which Ireland is known in Irish song (Mangan, J. C. "Songs of the Munster Bards"). See also W. B. Yeats "Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland" (Collected poems # 84).

⁴Macha; Irish Goddess. Finn; Leader of the Fianna, an ancient army of the king. Oisín; son of Finn.

⁵A Lament for Kilcash (*Caione chine cais*). Anon.

JOANNA M. WESTON

Names to Die

War dreams us,
wanting to hold violence,
with violent longing.

War: air-raid flashes
dressing the naked in shrouds,
(they wear only blood and torn flesh
before the searchlights come,
to provide white winding sheets)
until dark comes again
giving nakedness
to planes hurtling down the sky
to land in a child's garden,
amongst the irises, Japanese anemones,
that will flower purple and pink next year.

The dead change colours
by searchlight, in the night,
through seasons, as their skin
is shredded by worms and ants.

The dead play with names:
names that die,
listed "Missing Believed Killed,"
names on faded photographs
whose faces are known only
by those who love the names.
The rest are forgotten.

Joanna M. Weston has been published in several anthologies and magazines, including Chiron Review, Dandelion, Spin, Writer's Own Magazine, Green's Magazine, and Tidepool. Her most recent chapbook is All Seasons (1996).