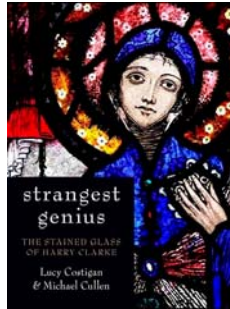


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JULY 1ST 2010

BOOK OF THE MONTH



Strangest Genius – the stained glass of Harry Clarke

This beautifully illustrated book contains a history and catalogue of the entire stained glass collection of Harry Clarke (1889-1931). The well-researched text is by Lucy Costigan and photography by Michael Cullen.

Strangest genius: the stained glass of Harry Clarke

318 pp. The History Press Ireland. To purchase this book online, go to www.thehistorypress.ie

BOOK REVIEW

This is a beautifully illustrated history and catalogue of the entire stained-glass collection of Harry Clarke (1889-1931). The well-researched text by Lucy Costigan sets Clarke's *oeuvre* within his life and times, which coincided with the struggle for independence and the early years of the Irish Free State. She also gives an account of what influenced Clarke to become an artist in stained-glass as well as a history of the art and craft of stained glass itself. What emerges is the "strangest genius", the enormously gifted and complex personality that was Harry Clarke himself. There is an abundance of information on the symbolism of the pictures, the stories behind the characters depicted and there are also interesting historical details from letters about the commissioning and about payments. There is also an account with pictures of the *Geneva Window* commissioned in 1927 by the Irish Free State Government for the International Labour Court, but ultimately rejected by it and now located at the Wolfsonian Art Museum, Miami, Florida. Much of the success of the book is how the detailed beauty of the lighted windows has been captured by photographer Michael Cullen and reproduced on the printed page. Congratulations to all involved in this excellent production. In October 2010 a 56-minute documentary film entitled *A Revel In Blue: Harry Clarke's Stained Glass* and a website www.harryclarke.net will be fully launched on RTÉ's *Nationwide*.

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- Australia: Queensland
- England: Cambridgeshire; Cheshire; Dorset; Durham; Hertfordshire; Lancashire; Rutland; Sussex; Warwickshire
- Ireland: County Antrim; County Clare; County Cork; County Donegal; County Down; County Dublin; County Galway; County Kerry; County Kildare; County Mayo; County Monaghan; County Offaly; County Tipperary; County Wexford; County Wicklow
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INTRODUCTION

On 7 January 1931, Lennox Robinson (1886-1958), Abbey playwright and later director, wrote an obituary of his friend and contemporary Harry Clarke, which was printed in *The Irish Times*. Robinson consoled readers that at least:

...they are there, for our generation, and for generations to come; those windows in the Honan Chapel in Cork, that marvellous east window in Terenure, those little windows in Monaghan, a glorious Last Judgement which is on its way to Mayo, Stations of the Cross in Lough Derg, and here and there in Ireland, England and America, glories from his imagination. They will shine and glow; those blues and reds – how he loved blue! – an inspiration to the faithful...

Harry Clarke (1889-1931) was considered Ireland's greatest stained-glass artist within his lifetime and, in a new millennium, this accolade is unlikely to be disputed. The name of Harry Clarke is synonymous with quality craftsmanship and imaginative genius. His use of deep rich colours, his delicate depiction of beautiful elongated figures with their finely carved features and deep expressive eyes, is indeed magical to behold. During his short life, Clarke created stained-glass windows for churches throughout Ireland and England, and as far afield as the United States of America and Australia. Clarke was also an illustrator of books for George G. Harrap & Co. London, and these works testify that his genius extended into the area of graphic art.

Stained glass is a breathtaking medium in which to admire a beautiful creation, yet the great limitation of photographing stained glass is that no reproduction can ever capture the dazzling, magical effect created by light streaming through a stained-glass Window. As this project evolved, however, we began to realise the enormous advantage of using photography to magnify tiny details from Clarke's windows that are often invisible to the human eye. Also, many of Clarke's stained-glass masterpieces are in churches that are remote and difficult to locate. Our intention with this publication is to bring Harry Clarke's beautiful windows to those who may never have visited the churches and museums where his work resides, and perhaps to inspire a new generation to view these wonderful windows in all their glory in their actual local settings.

It is also our wish that those who are familiar with Clarke's work will delight in this unique illustrative catalogue, where the entire collection of his magnificent, dazzling windows can be perused and enjoyed. We have included a detailed description of the meaning of symbols Clarke used in his work and the stories behind the characters depicted, based on several sources and years of research and travel. We envisage that this narrative will enhance the viewer's experience and deepen their appreciation of these exquisite, unique and glorious windows.

Lucy Costigan and Michael Cullen

April, 2010

HARRY CLARKE - STRANGEST GENIUS

Early years

Henry Patrick (Harry) Clarke, Ireland's world-renowned stained-glass artist, was born in Dublin on St Patrick's Day, 17 March 1889. His father, Joshua (1858-1921), emigrated from Leeds in Yorkshire to Dublin at the age of eighteen, in 1877. Joshua had been raised a Protestant but converted to Catholicism to marry Brigid McGonigal from Sligo, an aunt of artist Maurice McGonigal, RHA. They had four children, Walter, Kathleen (Lally), Florence (Dolly), and Harry. Clarke set up a church-decorating business and, in 1892, Joshua Clarke & Sons expanded into the stained-glass area (1). Joshua received commissions from ecclesiastical and business establishments all over Ireland and England. The young Harry grew up with a studio at the back of his home at 33 North Frederick Street. Brigid had poor health and suffered from chest complaints. Both Walter and Harry inherited this weakness (2).

Harry attended Marlborough Model School and later the Jesuit Belvedere College, located just around the corner from his home in North Frederick Street (3). Belvedere College was typical for its time, in that religion was taught in a strict manner whereby hell and damnation awaited unrepentant sinners while salvation in the next life was assured to those who lived a life of penance and piety. A few years earlier James Joyce (1882-1941) had attended Belvedere and it became the setting for his book *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. It is often surmised that the effect on the sensitive young Harry of this zealous doctrine was acute. Although Clarke is famous for his delicate portrayal of beautiful saints, angels, and heroines in his stained-glass work, some of his later book illustrations show a fascination with the sexually decadent and macabre, and may reflect the medieval dualism of his early religious indoctrination.

In August 1903, Harry Clarke's mother Brigid died at the age of forty-three. He was fourteen years old. This event greatly affected him, as his mother had been his closest confidant. In 1904, Clarke left school and became apprenticed to an architect. This position was of short duration, however, as in 1905, Clarke became apprenticed to his father's studio (5). It was here that he spent five years learning the craft of stained glass from Dublin craftsman William Nagle (6).

Study and first success

At the age of fifteen, Clarke began taking night classes in stained glass at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. His teacher was A.E. Child, English craftsman, and manager An Túr Gloine (7). In 1911, Clarke won a gold medal from the Board of Education National Competition at South Kensington, London, for his window *The Consecration of Mel, Bishop of Longford, by St Patrick*. Over 13,000 works were submitted by students for these competitions and only two Irish students were awarded gold medals (8). This was the first of three consecutive gold medals that Clarke won at the National Competitions for his stained-glass work.

At the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, Clarke met Margaret Crilly, a gifted artist and teacher, originally from Newry, County Down. In many ways Margaret was the opposite of Clarke. Whereas Clarke was tall and thin, prone to poor health, highly sensitive and imaginative, Margaret was small, physically robust, and of a practical disposition (9). To the surprise of many, the pair married on 31 October 1914 and moved into a flat at 33 North Frederick Street. They subsequently had three children, Ann, Michael and David. Clarke's brother, Walter, married Margaret's sister Mary, known as Minnie, in June 1915 (10).

First commissions

Clarke soon set about getting commissions for illustrations and stained glass. Laurence 'Larky' Waldron, stockbroker, Nationalist MP, Governor of the National Gallery of Ireland and Governor of Belvedere College, became an influential friend and patron of Clarke's from the summer of 1912 until Waldron's death in December 1923. Clarke became a frequent visitor at Waldron's home 'Marino', at Ballybrack, overlooking Killiney Bay. It was there that the young artist was introduced to many of Dublin's intelligentsia (11).

Waldron gave Clarke his first commission in book illustration, in 1913, to illustrate Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. Clarke also began experimenting with stained-glass panels inspired by literary themes. He created a series of nine panels for Waldron based on John Millington Synge's 'Queens'. The panels were set in wrought-iron frames that were made by Dublin furniture designer James Hicks, who also attracted Waldron's patronage. The delicacy, rich colours, and fine craftsmanship of these panels won Clarke's international acclaim.

Clarke's studies at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art were completed in 1913 and he decided to rent a studio in London. While there, he began his search to secure a publisher for his book illustrations. After traipsing around London and being rejected by several eminent publishers, Clarke finally arrived at the door of George G. Harrap. In his memoirs, Harrap described his first meeting with Clarke, 'He came into my room late in the afternoon, slim, pale and youthful, with the air of one who has had rebuffs. He opened his portfolio very shyly, and with delicate fingers drew out his lovely drawings' (12). By Christmas of 1913 Clarke had secured his first commission from Harrap, to illustrate Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales*. It was published in 1916.

At this point, Clarke gave up his London studio and returned to Dublin. As part of the scholarship he had been awarded by the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, he travelled to France to visit Chartres Cathedral in January 1914 (13). His father, Joshua, was delighted with his son's achievements and travelled to Paris to spend a short holiday with his son (14). Then, when war was declared in August 1914, the supply of glass and lead from London dried up, which seriously affected Clarke's business (15).

Clarke used his father's studios, paying him rent and occasionally helping his father out, but generally he worked on his own commissions (16). There were a number of stained-glass artists and designers employed by Joshua Clarke & Sons who assisted Clarke with some of his commissions, including Philip Deegan, Austin Molloy, Norah MacGuinness, Kathleen Quigley, Leo Cartwright, and Millicent Girling (17).

In October 1914, Sir John O'Connell, a governor at Belvedere College and trustee of the deceased Miss Honan's will, invited Clarke to submit designs for several windows for the Honan Chapel of St Finbarr, at University College Cork (18). Clarke won the commission and, between 1915 and 1918, created nine windows for the Honan Chapel. These magnificent windows were central to building a solid reputation for Clarke's skilled draftsmanship and originality. Other important commissions followed for windows in churches throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom. He also continued to illustrate books for the London publishers Harrap, including Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1919) and an anthology of poetry, *The Year's at the Spring* (1920).

1916 Rebellion

The Easter Rising of 1916 affected North Frederick Street, which is just north of O'Connell Street (then Sackville Street), where all the fighting took place. Joshua was away from home and could not return immediately. The men in the studios were not allowed to leave the building for four days. A few bullets struck the walls of No.33, but no one was hurt. The greatest damage that Clarke endured was the loss of the blocks for his illustrations for Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In his CV, Clarke wrote, 'illustrated *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 1913, unpublished, owing to rebellion fires in 1916' (19). Several of his illustrations were also destroyed at the premises of Maunsel & Co., in Middle Abbey Street (20).

Management of Joshua Clarke & Sons

In August 1921, Clarke wrote to one of Joshua Clarke's clients, 'My father is very ill and unable to attend to any business. My brother is in Scotland and I am left here to try and manage my own affairs and theirs' (21).

Joshua died on 13 September 1921. Clarke moved into Nos 6 and 7 North Frederick Street and assumed responsibility for Joshua Clarke & Sons stained glass, while Walter managed the ecclesiastical and general decoration side of the business. In 1924, the studios comprised thirty-five employees who worked a sixty-hour week (22). An advertisement for J. Clarke & Sons at Nos 6, 7, and 33 North Frederick, Street Dublin, shows the extent of their business:

The Studios, situated in the charming old Georgian house in North Frederick Street, Dublin, are always open to visitors who may be interested in our work. It has been stated that the work produced in these studios is unexcelled and every opportunity is afforded to inspect the numerous commissions in progress. We are prepared to submit proposals of costs for our products from our Studios for any part of the world. Representatives in Australia: Joseph O'Connor, Sydney. Representatives in New Zealand: Peter M. O'Brien, Tauranga, North Island (23).

Further commissions

Clarke continued to work on his own commissions. His workload was considerable, yet his reputation for creating original stained-glass work of the highest quality and craftsmanship continued to grow. Commissions rolled in, including one in 1923 for a three-light window for St Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane, Australia, six two-light windows to represent the life of Christ at the Presentation Chapel at Dingle in 1924, and eight windows depicting the life of Mary at the Convent of Notre Dame in Sussex in 1925. In the autumn of 1924, Clarke was elected an associate member of the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) (24), and became a full academician in the spring of 1925 (25). His wife, Margaret, achieved full RHA status in April 1927 (26).

Book illustrations

Clarke's success in book illustration continued with a number of publications: *The Fairy Tales* of Charles Perrault was published by George G. Harrap in 1922; the exquisite and poignant *Ireland's Memorial Records 1914-1918*, was published by Maunsel & Roberts Ltd, Dublin, in 1923. Clarke produced two sets of book illustrations for whiskey distillers Jameson's of Dublin, entitled *The History of the Great House – Origin of John Jameson Whiskey* (1924) and *The Elixir of Life* (1925). From the mid-1920s Clarke's illustrations tended towards the grotesque and 'obscene' (27). His illustrations of Goethe's *Faust*, published in 1925 by George G. Harrap & Co. and *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, published by John Lane - The Bodley Head (1928), contain erotic and highly decadent sexual imagery. Clarke's stained-glass work, however, continued to depict the angelic beauty of saints and cherubs. This two-sided personality baffled many, yet Clarke's artistic nature demanded free expression to create according to his own wishes.

The Geneva Window

In 1925, the Irish Government approached Clarke with a view to creating a window for the International Labour Court in Geneva. This infamous commission saw Clarke finally fall foul of the conservative values of the new Irish State. The window depicted scenes from the literature of many of Ireland's finest writers, including Nobel laureate William Butler Yeats and one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century, James Joyce. He included extracts from Joyce and O'Flaherty, but works by both writers were considered licentious and decadent by the Irish Church and State. Clarke also included depictions of scantily clad women and young lovers who oozed eroticism and sexuality. Joxer, from O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock*, was perceived as portraying Ireland as a land of drunkards.

The *Geneva Window* was never installed in Geneva and Clarke's appeals to receive a decision about the window from President Cosgrave were in vain. Payment for the window was only received after Clarke's death and the window was subsequently locked away in Government Buildings. It was bought back from the State by his widow, Margaret, in 1932. Clarke's sons sold the window to an art collector called Mitchell Wolfson in 1988. The Geneva Window is now on permanent exhibition at the

Wolfsonian Museum in Miami, affiliated with Florida International University, in the Art Deco district of Miami (28).

Travels

In January 1926, Clarke was involved in a serious bicycle accident. During his subsequent recuperation, his friend Lennox Robinson persuaded him to take a holiday (29). They visited York, Burgos, Seville and Tangier. While in Tangier, Clarke sent a postcard to his wife Margaret, 'We came here yesterday and I am still amazed at everything I see – in Spain it was wonderful and here more so. I went for a ride on mules this morning – my thinness irritated my mule very much' (30).

Poor health and overwork

In 1929, Clarke was diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis. He had been in poor physical health most of his life and this was perhaps exacerbated by the use of chemicals in his stained-glass work. In 1925, Clarke portrayed himself as Faust for the illustration of Goethe's classic. He also depicted a figure that may be a self-portrait in one of the panels of *The Last Judgement* in Newport, County Mayo. This tormented figure is banished to hell and eternal damnation.

Clarke struggled to complete the many stained-glass commissions that continued to demand his attention. He was particularly delighted to receive his first American commission in 1928, for forty windows for the Basilica of St Vincent de Paul in Bayonne, New Jersey. Nine of these windows, depicting angels bearing symbols of the Mass, were completed under Clarke's supervision. (The Studios continued to work on the remaining thirty-one windows up until the 1940s.) Clarke was under increased pressure to complete commissions around this time. In March 1929, he was forced to travel to a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland, in an effort to cure his consumption.

While at Davos, Clarke continued to work on designs for the windows and was in frequent contact with home and the Studios. Walter, whose health was also very poor, and their sister Dolly took over running the business in Clarke's absence (31). In early 1930, Clarke's representatives negotiated a division of the business on his behalf, whereby Walter became manager of the church-decorating business, retaining the name of Joshua Clarke & Sons Ltd. Clarke established his stained-glass business to be known as the Harry Clarke Studios.

Clarke finally returned to Dublin in May 1930 and immediately struggled to catch up on a huge backlog of work (32). On 20 July, Walter died suddenly of pneumonia and so ended the church-decorating business (33). Despite his failing health and the huge loss of Walter, Clarke continued to work on outstanding commissions.

Death in Coire, Switzerland

In October 1930, Clarke was forced to return to Davos in an attempt to bolster his now seriously deteriorating health (34). He spent his last Christmas at the Victoria Sanatorium, receiving regular correspondence from family and friends, including a Christmas card and letter from George Harrap: We often think of you here. I am constantly reminded when I look up from my desk, by that beautiful drawing of Cinderella which you gave me some years ago. I hope that your spirit can still be lifted up and that you can think with equal kindness of your old association here (35).

Clarke's health continued to deteriorate. Fearing he might die in a foreign country, he left Davos in a plan to travel home to Dublin. Having been plagued by ill health for most of his life, Harry Clarke died in his sleep on 6 January 1931 in Coire, Switzerland. He was forty-one years old. His wife, Margaret, and his friends Lennox Robinson and Captain Alan Duncan, attended the funeral in Coire (36).

Throughout his life, Clarke was befriended by many of Ireland's leading artists and writers, and several of his early influential patrons became close friends. In *The Davos Courier*, the editor described his likeability:

He was one of those magnetic men to whom if you had once talked with him, you were always afterwards drawn. There was a quiet charm about him that would not let you go. A true Irishman who was in the right place judging by his heart rather than his health. As the first President of the Davos Irish Circle he was one of those men whose devotion to the National health at home left him wide-minded and broad-hearted, open-eyed for all that is good and beautiful in men and women and in nature everywhere, ever true to the kindred points of heaven and home (37).

The Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) wrote to Margaret to offer sympathy and to let her know that, at the Academy's AGM on 20 January, 'the members stood for a moment's silence in honour of Harry Clarke' (38). The Academy also stated:

It is with very deep regret that this Academy records the death on the 6th of January of Harry Clarke, R.H.A. In the passing of Harry Clarke, Ireland has lost an artist of rare distinction and the Academy a highly valued member. Examples of Harry Clarke's work in stained glass are to be seen not in Ireland only but in many places abroad.

As a book illustrator he gave his abundant fancy full rein, and in this, as in all his work, the teeming fertility of his imagination is manifest.

Margaret erected a simple headstone over her husband's grave. A custom in Switzerland deemed that fifteen years after a burial, a notice was placed in the national newspapers requiring the family of the deceased to declare that they would continue to maintain the grave. Since the Clarke family had no knowledge of this, Clarke's remains were disinterred and were buried in a communal area. The headstone was destroyed and no trace of it remains.

Harry Clarke Studios

After Clarke's death, the Harry Clarke Studios continued to create stained-glass windows. His wife, Margaret, his sisters, Dolly and Lally, and his children, David and Ann took an active interest in the Studios. Their aim was to keep alive the brilliant, jewel-like effect, with its vibrant reds and blues, that Clarke had mastered. Commissions continued to be received and completed, particularly from Irish clergy who had established churches in Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America (39). Over the years the Studios supported two sisters, two widows and nine Clarke children. Walter's son Terence and Harry's daughter Ann studied art and brought their skills into the Studios. Harry's son David also became an artist and did some freelance work for the Studios (40). Charles Simmonds managed the newly formed Studios from 1 April 1930. Richard J. King joined the firm in 1928 and became manager when Simmonds returned to England in 1935. William Dowling succeeded King as manager from 1940 until the Studios' closure in 1973 (41).

Still, the Harry Clarke Studios lacked the brilliance and genius of their founder, who had incorporated such spectacular designs and techniques into his windows. An article in *The Irish Times* reported that: Harry Clarke, however, with his brilliant and exotic colouring and his exotic figures – perhaps too exotic for religious sentiment – gave glass a new orientation, and modernised a medieval art. As we see in these windows, his studio has carried on the tradition, though conforming more to the conventional religious atmosphere (42).

Margaret Clarke died on 31 October 1961 (43). The Studios continued their stained-glass work for a further decade. Over the years, however, the quality of the work sadly lessened, as cheaper glass and poor quality colouring was used to economise. The Harry Clarke Studios finally closed in 1973.

Legacy

Despite being beset by poor health throughout his short life, Clarke still managed to create some of the finest work produced in the medium of stained glass in the twentieth century. Clarke created over 160 stained-glass windows for church and commercial commissions, as well as several exquisite panels for private patrons. Some of Clarke's most celebrated work includes the nine windows he created for the Honan Chapel at Cork University; the *Eve of St Agnes* panels at Dublin City Gallery – The Hugh Lane; the *Life of Christ* windows at Díseart in Dingle; the set of full-length windows at Bewley's cafe, Dublin, and the *Geneva Window*, now at the Wolfsonian in Miami, Florida. Clarke's book illustrations continue to fascinate and delight new generations of readers and collectors worldwide.

Clarke's contemporary, George Russell, known as AE, stated that, 'He might have incarnated here from the dark side of the moon ... Harry Clarke is one of the strangest geniuses of his time' (44).

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