

# Oscailt

**Oscailt** since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

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112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

Minister: Rev. Bridget Spain  
e-mail: [revbspain@gmail.com](mailto:revbspain@gmail.com)  
Rev. Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus*.

[hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org](mailto:hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org)  
[www.dublinunitarianchurch.org](http://www.dublinunitarianchurch.org)  
[www.unitarianchurchcork.com](http://www.unitarianchurchcork.com)  
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## **Cork Unitarian Church**

Princes Street, Cork  
Minister: Rev. Mike O'Sullivan

Editor: Paul Spain

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**Front Cover:** A montage of pictures commemorating WWI (photo P. Spain)

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# Oscailt

Our magazine title, **Oscailt**, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the mans ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt*, (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

# A unique type of courage

We continue the tradition of remembering five volunteer soldiers from this congregation who died in the First World War. We recall lives that ended before they had the opportunity to really live. The service is an act of remembrance, a reminder of the devastation of war.

These young lives sum up the cost of war. William Wilkes Fitzgerald was an only child. The Falkiner brothers lost their lives within days of one another. Their deaths probably contributed to the premature death of their mother in 1922 aged just 52. The stories of the other young men have faded; their only legacy is a plaque of remembrance in our porch.

In 1914 these young men were told that they were fighting the War that would end all wars. They believed the war would be short; over by Christmas. It would be an adventure and an opportunity to test courage perhaps.

Frederick Ewan Baldwin Falkiner was decorated for bravery. He was awarded the Military Cross for his courage. His troops were being targeted by a German machine gun. Frederick took a few men to take out the machine gun. When his men were wounded or killed he continued alone and single headedly killed two Germans and took thirty prisoners. Was this exceptional courage, bloody minded stubbornness or a death wish?

The defining narrative of the Second World War was the systematic killing of Jews. At the end of the war many Germans claimed to be ignorant of what was perpetrated in their name. But some Germans knew; some dared to speak out. Their acts of defiance were not spur of the moment decisions. They knew they would endanger family members. They together with their families paid an extraordinary high price for just speaking out.

The dreadful crimes of the war were the culmination of an incremental process of repressing democracy. In 1933 Hitler built concentration camps. He bypassed the courts. The first prisoners in the camps were political opponents. Without political opposition he passed laws at will to suit his agenda. In the absence of political opposition he went on to incarcerate members of the communist party, trade unionists, gypsies, men who were gay and of course Jews.

He took control of newspapers and radio stations. Hitler took power in 1933; the defining move against the Jews came in 1938. There

were five years where gradually the pillars of democracy were whittled away. In the years leading up to 1939 the Nazis silenced the opposition until finally there were few who dared to speak out.

He began his killing by targeting the most vulnerable members of society - the mentally retarded and mentally ill. Their deaths caused barely a ripple; this was a stepping stone to greater horrors. There were some exceptionally brave souls who spoke out against the regime. They paid a high price as did family members. One such family were the Scholls.

In June 1942 a group of University students in Munich founded the "White Rose Movement". This was a non violent resistance group that called for active opposition to the Nazi regime. They used graffiti and anonymous leafleting in their campaign. Leaflets appeared in phone books, in libraries and at bus shelters. In all they produced six protest leaflets; which were reproduced in different parts of southern Germany. In the second leaflet they denounced the persecution and mass murder of the Jews. So some people knew what was happening.

Hans and Sophie Scholl were members of the White Rose Group. Their parents were Robert and Magdalena Scholl. Robert and Magdalena had six children. One died in infancy. On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1943 Sophie and Hans Scholl left anti Nazi leaflets in Munich University. From the atrium Sophie dropped a bunch of leaflets allowing them to float to the ground floor.

She was spotted by the caretaker and reported to the Gestapo. Brother and sister were arrested and interrogated. Neither of them betrayed their co conspirators. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> February, just three days after their crime they were tried and immediately guillotined. As she left her cell to die Sophie said how proud she was that she had not betrayed anyone.

Their parents and two sisters were arrested and interrogated. The father Robert was sentenced to jail for shouting words of support for his condemned children. He was liberated at the end of the war. Their brother Werner was a medical officer serving in the German army; Werner was reported missing presumed killed in May 1944. At the time of their deaths Hans was twenty four years old, Sophie was twenty one, Werner twenty two. Three lives snuffed out.

Another remarkable story of family resistance to the Nazis was that of the Bonhoffer family. Dietrich Bonhoffer is the best known member of that family. Dietrich was a Lutheran pastor. It was his Christian faith that impelled him to oppose the Nazis. In the 1940 he

went to America to study. He could have spent the war quietly in America. Within weeks he returned to Germany deliberating putting himself at risk of arrest by the Nazis.

Over time Dietrich became convinced that to save Germany Hitler had to die. On the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1944 an attempt was made on Hitler's life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in prison at the time yet he came under suspicion as did other members of his family.

In April 1945 as the war was drawing to its bloody conclusion about two hundred individuals suspected of collusion in the assassination plot were killed. Of the seven Bonhoeffer children the eldest Walter died during the First World War. Dietrich and his brother Klaus were both hanged in April 1945. The husbands of their sisters Ursula and Christine were hanged just days before Hitler took his life.

Frederick Falkiner and thousands of other soldiers showed courage under gunfire. For them it may have been a matter of kill or be killed. Individuals like the Scholl and Bonhoeffer family showed courage of a different kind. They faced imprisonment and torture and knew they were putting family members in danger. They knew they would not be allowed an easy death. There would be no medal awarded for their courage. There would be financial and social consequences for their surviving family. They knew this and they did what they believed was the right thing.

We must value our democracy. Democracy is not perfect but it is the greatest safeguard we have. We must guard democratic values. We stand for equality and the dignity of every person- especially the vulnerable. On Remembrance Sunday we honour the sacrifices made by earlier generations.

*Rev. Bridget Spain*

Minister Dublin Unitarian Church

Dublin 14<sup>th</sup> November 2021

*This the second part of Clive Geraghty's article,  
The first part in the October magazine.*

## TREASURY 2

Once the learner of a language has acquired an interest in that language, the next requirement is a good bilingual dictionary; then it becomes necessary to find out how the nuts and bolts all fit together, so a grammar textbook becomes a necessity. In 2005 I started with an English language primer 'Teach Yourself Irish' which I found to be simple, clear and comprehensive. Then when I had started studying for a diploma in Irish in Maynooth University I bought 'Cruinnscriobh na Gaelige', another excellent beginner's guide to a very difficult tongue. Some of the elements that learners have difficulty with is the VSO\* system, as opposed to the SVO of the English language, which is simpler. Inflection of words also complicates matters and having two genders doesn't help, but some languages, Russian for instance, has three.

Irish is the oldest vernacular language after Greek, so learning Old Irish entailed a great deal of hard work but a lot of pleasure, and no small amount of pride in the achievements of our ancestors, who created a literature of great distinction shortly after the coming of Christianity in the 5<sup>th</sup> century brought writing to Ireland, literature which is highly regarded and prized wherever great art is appreciated. So several good textbooks were required to help my studies in Old Irish.

But it was in the study of Modern Irish that my magpie tendency came to the fore. I love old books and so, among the practical grammar books to help me with my studies, I also collected a few old curios, designed to help and encourage previous generations. Shortly after Conradh na Gaelige (The Gaelic League) was founded in 1894 they brought out a series of small handbooks to try to arrest the decline of Irish, which Douglas Hyde and other far-seeing people saw as imminent. The booklets were written by Rev. Eugene O'Growney and sold in their thousands; my copy says on the cover 'Five hundred and second Thousand'. The editions I have date from 1918 and cost sixpence. I have a couple of school textbooks from the thirties and forties, printed in the old typeface with its own distinctive lettering, with dots over letters to denote lenition. One of the best is a very small booklet written by the playwright Mairéad Ni Ghráda, which consists of just 48 pages, 24 leaves, but it is a gem. These books are not old enough to be antiquarian or rare enough to be valuable, but I treasure them nevertheless.

Doing a quick count, I find I have just under twenty grammar books of various types and styles, and if I had absorbed even a hundredth part of their contents, I would be a happy man. Alas, buying a rule book does not transfer the knowledge therein to the owner's brain, however eager he or she may be. But we'll go on learning, the journey is worth it.

\*VSO= Verb, Subject, Object. SVO= Subject, Verb, Object

# Who?

Who is that old lady who follows me around  
and looks out of my mirrors ?

Is it me?

I am not she

My soul has no crow's feet, nor is its hair white  
but it is old  
really old  
older than this body I find myself in.

I came into being when fire was new  
danced in young bodies around it,  
died in young bodies on battlefields,  
from the plague,  
in childbirth.  
Rarely acquired an old body  
to house my old soul.

But now  
my body is trying to suit my soul.  
Rather than regret  
I must celebrate.  
Not mourn the loss of my youth  
but realise  
I simply wore it for a while  
like a cloak.

©*Madeline A Stringer*

6th September 2022

## Love's austere and lonely offices

My address this morning is entitled 'Love's austere and lonely offices' and offers some reflection on the difficulties of truly embracing love. The title of the address comes from the closing line of a poem by Robert Hayden, that suggests that love often requires dutiful office.

Humankind generally makes the case that love is the underlying pillar of our lives. The idea of love is interwoven in all Buddhist teaching and the Buddha exhorts us 'to radiate boundless love towards the entire world'. In his first letter to the Corinthians, St Paul reminds us 'And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love'. The songwriters John Lennon and Paul McCartney tell us 'All you need is love, love is all you need'. The great English playwright Tom Stoppard, in a recent interview, declared with a Wildean flourish 'I'm very much in favour of love'.

So, we are agreed then. The ayes have it. Love is what it is all about. So why don't we just get on with it? Ah maybe it is not so easy. There are 'other' people involved. And people can be bothersome, messy, untrustworthy, even cruel at times.

Pamela McCarthy addressing us awhile ago in this church spoke about the Parable of the Good Samaritan and how in many ways, the parable sets a very high bar for loving our fellow beings. In the parable, a priest and a Levite cross to the other side of the road to avoid helping an injured man. I suspect there are many of us here who have crossed to that *other* side of the road on occasions, to avoid an engagement with a fellow human that would necessitate us providing help, emotional support, and possible love.

Further, in the parable Jesus tells that if we wish to inherit eternal life, it is necessary to 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. Jesus has a wide definition of who our neighbour might be. It includes those who might do us harm, even our enemies. To love our enemy is truly a big ask.

So love is not a trivial task. To love, in its many manifesta-

tions, presents challenge. Love as revealed in an act of generosity, in a charitable or community endeavour, in a caregiving relationship, in romantic engagement, in marriage, in reproductive intimacy, in friendship, in a long-term partnership, such love can bring great solace and enrichment to the loved. But for she or he who loves, it can be often difficult. Blowing a kiss or giving a warm embrace is nice but easy. Lasting love, the kind that permeates our development as a human being and that enables us to flourish, must be worked at for the most part.

In my reading earlier, Tish Harrison Warren ('I married the wrong person, and I'm so glad I did') describes the difficult journey in the early years of her marriage, reminding us that Jesus' call to love your enemy, and to love your spouse, can sometimes be one and the same. Yet her 'kitchen floor moments', when her husband and herself were in tears and bone-weary on the floor, were the moments when she felt the growth in their marriage really began.

So if love and loving can be difficult to do, and other people can be very unlovable at times, is there any path forward? Well one suggestion might be to broaden what we mean by love. One the greatest thinkers on the subject of love over the past century is the Dublin-born writer Iris Murdoch. Her approach is to redefine love. For her, the Christian ideal of wishing for your neighbour what you would want for yourself, requires an unrealistic superhuman virtue. Instead, she suggests love as looking.

More precisely, Murdoch defines love as 'giving your attention' to the other person. It involves switching down our 'fat relentless ego' and being aware of the world as it exists outside our own interests. She writes 'Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real'. So defined, 'loving attention' is not just about doing good deeds, it is about gaining knowledge. Inevitably, it brings you closer to an appreciation of moral truth, or the good. As pure, egoless attention, love is simply trying to understand other people ... a task which does not come to an end. Murdoch contends 'Good is the magnetic centre towards which love naturally moves'.

Murdoch's broadening of the concept of love can also be seen as a call to try to be more empathetic towards other people – to walk a mile in their shoes so that you might understand them more – and so the challenge of loving them becomes easier. In-



deed, just listening to the other can at times be usefully empathetic.

I must confess to a fascination for ruins-ruined houses, cottages or castles. Seeing one, my imagination immediately flares up at the thought of who was born there, who lived there, and what were their fortunes through life. These ruins become storied magic-full places.

I am afraid I must also admit that I often take the same approach with other people and consider them storied ruins – fellow humans who each have led unique lives, have contributed to the wonderful human project, and have invariably interesting stories to tell. In this way, a relevant engagement with each person becomes easier, perhaps even leading to Murdoch’s loving attention.

Yet another contention in considering love is its measure or measurement. Does love have a metric? Is there a balance sheet involved? Should we expect a thank-you or some reward? Should we count thank-you’s and rewards? Our answer here should be one of caution to do so. At the least, it suggests a conditionality that is often detrimental to true love. As St Augustine is reputed to have said, ‘The measure of love is to love without measure’. We love because it enables us and others to live meaningful lives, It is simply the right road to follow.

The Good Samaritan was not looking for any reward for his kindness. He had no expectation that the two denari he gave the innkeeper on his departure to look after the injured man would be repaid. Rather St Luke tells us that he said to the innkeeper ‘Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return’. The Samaritan was a compassionate man who did what he did because he believed it was the right thing to do.

I read an interesting magazine piece a while ago, written by an adult daughter, about caregiving towards a father who had treated her indifferently for most of her life. He was now dying of Stage 4 lung cancer and Covid had arrived. I quote from her article. ‘During quarantine, my husband and I hosted weekly film nights at our apartment, making big meals and screening old movies. My father said he loved these

nights. And yet, he was as distant and difficult as he'd always been. What do we owe our parents? Do we owe them more than what they gave us? If we've given them a thousand chances to be better for us, do we give them *one* more?

She continues 'As I was making pancakes, yet another dinner that I anticipated my father not quite appreciating, I called my friend Tara and asked how I could keep taking care of someone who made me so angry. "By doing the right thing," she said. "Which is?" I replied. "Making pancakes" was her answer.

In dealing with an imperfect parent, I've found comfort in doing what is right – putting a plate of food down in front of my dad even if he doesn't particularly notice.'

At this juncture, what can we conclude about the difficulty of truly embracing love? Not much, I suspect. We can accept that love's embrace will often present difficulty. In coping with such difficulty, we might try some deep listening with and loving attention to the other person – heck, try considering the other as a 'ruin' with a great story. And finally, be very slow to measure love, and suppress any desire to produce balance sheets of who owes what to whom.

I am fond of quoting Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit priest, philosopher, and palaeontologist, who contends 'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience. In loving – whether it be a small act of kindness or a lifelong devotion, the human and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred, the mortal and the divine, become seamlessly interwoven. It is love, in its myriad of expressions, that enables us to live decent, authentic, and worthwhile lives.

In conclusion, I will read the poem 'Those Winter Sundays' by Robert Hayden, the closing line of which is the title of this address. The poem, written in three short stanzas, is about a steadfast fatherly love towards his young son, the poem's speaker, who remains largely indifferent or unappreciative, until later in life, when he realises the quiet tenacity of that love.

## **Those Winter Sundays**

by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early

and put his clothes on in the blue-black cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labour in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked  
him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering,  
breaking.

When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house.

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices.

*Aidan O'Driscoll*

Dublin Unitarian Church

Address at Dublin Unitarian Church, St Stephen's Green,  
18 September 2022

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's  
choice for September 2022.**

# Klara and the Sun

by  
*Kazuo Ishiguro*

In *Klara and the Sun* Kazuo Ishiguro imagines a future where society has changed due to great advances in technology, yet it is a recognisable world and not beyond belief. There still exists a class divide, the rich and the poor, immigrants, the disenfranchised and the unemployed. There are whole classes of people who have lost their jobs due to new technology and artificial intelligence. Some of these disenfranchised communities are perceived to have right wing tendencies, they have gone off grid and are willing to bear arms against an unnamed perceived enemy.

The rich have the option to have their children genetically edited or “lifted”, a procedure that enhances intelligence and guarantees a university education and a future. But this ‘lifting’ carries a risk of an unidentifiable illness that can lead to death. The lifted children are schooled at home with on-line tutors, they often live in isolation. They lack social skills and therefore have arranged interaction meetings with other children of their own age. Many of these children have artificial friends, AFs or androids whose purpose is to befriend them and to help them with loneliness and anxiety. Klara is one of these AFs.

We first meet Klara in the AF store. She and the other AFs await to be purchased by a family with a lifted child who is in need of their service. The AFs are solar powered and are obsessed with the sun and position in the sky. They each get to spend time in the shop window to show themselves off to prospective buyers and also to soak up the sun’s rays. It is while Klara takes her turn in the shop window that she forms her view of the world. She is programmed to pick up on human emotions yet sometimes humans can be contradictory, like when she sees two old people meet and they seem happy to see each other yet they are crying. Klara also sees a beggarman and his dog lie motionless in a door-

way. Klara thinks they are dead but the next day the sun shines on them and by ‘giving them nourishment’ they come back to life. The irony of this irrational thought that the sun is a God and a healer is not lost on the reader as it is this naïve faith and hope that drives Klara into certain actions later in the story.

Klara also sees a road maintenance machine with the logo of Coots on it. This machine spews out fumes and pollution which obscures the sun’s rays and goodness. The Coots machine is in Klara’s view an enemy of the sun.

Eventually Klara is bought by a family, Chrissie, a divorced mother and her 14 year old daughter Josie. Josie has been lifted but is often very ill and weak. We learn that Josie’s sister had also been lifted but had died. Klara and Josie become close friends and it is very touching how devoted Klara is to Josie and how she wants to protect her and save her from her illness. Josie does have another friend, her neighbour Rick who is the same age. Rick has not been lifted and despite being very clever faces an uncertain future as he is unable to secure a place in a university. It is Rick and Josie’s young love for each other that help them both to survive. Klara sees this love and when Josie becomes gravely ill she makes a bargain with the sun that if she destroys the Coots machine then the sun could heal Josie by shining his goodness on her, just like the beggarman. Klara enlists Rick to help her make this plea to the sun and then she gets Josie’s father, one of the post technology unemployed, to help her destroy the Coots machine by syphoning off some of her own essential fluid into a container and then pouring it into the Coots machine which will disable it. This very symbolic blood sacrifice of Klara has layers of religious overtones and Ishiguro plays with our perception that androids would not be so irrational or naïve to believe in a sun god, and that humans would only have a faith and trust in science and technology.

Josie does get better and moves on in life and to University. Rick too moves on showing that being lifted is not the only way to succeed. They still love each other, but differently now they are older. Klara tries to understand this changing love, and it is this central theme of love that Ishiguro explores, especially the love of parents for their children versus the expectations and ‘norms’ of society.

Klara eventually ends up in a skipyard where she will have her 'slow fade'. She does not resent this and is content that she served her purpose to protect and be a friend to Josie, she still has faith in the sun's goodness and also surprisingly in humans.

Kazuo Ishiguro gives us much food for thought in this somewhat disturbing and issue laden novel. Some of the readers thought there were too many ethical issues and themes to digest. Most of us enjoyed reading it and enjoyed how the author revealed the story. It was a worthwhile read with about half of us saying they would recommend it. I myself would recommend it as a novel of our times.

*Alison Claffey*  
Dublin Unitarian Church

## The Things I Love to Hate

I've found a way to calm my mind which helps me to relax,  
It really gets me to unwind and counters stress attacks.  
When life begins to get me down I sit and meditate  
For several minutes by myself, on the things I love to hate.

Those mindless morons in their cars who thrive in every town,  
They play loud, thumping music as they drive with windows down.  
They're craving our attention with their senseless pounding noise.  
They must have been neglected when they were little boys.

Those stupid signs you see in shops annoy me to excess  
Which put in an apostrophe for words which end with 's',  
Whether genitive or plural, they just don't have a clue;  
But I'll have to grin and bear it. What else can I do?

Those dangerous ignoramuses on mobile phones, who drive  
With one hand on the steering wheel. How do they stay alive?  
They're a risk to other people but no one seems to care -  
Until they kill or maim someone – it really isn't fair.

That recent blight upon our lives –“Reality TV”-  
With its misappropriation of the word ‘celebrity’.  
“Big Brother” and “Love Island”, “You’re a Star”- Oh, what a farce!  
I'd love to take the whole sad bunch and put them out to grass!

The conceited politician who thinks he owns the place,  
Avoiding direct questions with a smirk upon his face.  
When the next election's coming up he'll sing a different tune,  
He'll go round kissing babies and promise you the moon.

Those garrulous wine-tasters who pretend they know it all,  
Their ostentatious prattling just drives me up the wall.  
They sniff and sip and swill and spit, and mince around the table.  
They wouldn't know the white from red if it wasn't for the label!  
Those blithering bible-bashers who ring my blinking bell,  
One day I'm going to ask them, “Do you believe in hell?  
If so, why don't you go there, now?” They'd turn and off they'd

plod.

I'm sure they want to save me, but I'm an atheist, thank God!

The restless child who's brought to church and kicks up such a noise,  
While its parents sit there watching and won't see that it annoys.

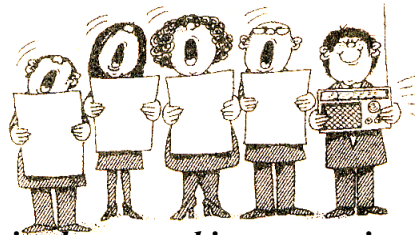
It's hard enough to hear the words especially when we're old,  
But must we suffer little children who aren't properly controlled?

I know I should be tolerant of other people's quirks,  
But that kind of behaviour makes me think that they're just jerks.

I never will accept it, no matter how I try,  
But I know I mustn't overlook the beam in my own eye!

*John Ward*  
September 2005

## Dublin Unitarian Church



*Our choir is always seeking new voices to join us.*

We gather on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays at 10.00a.m.

Starting 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022

All singers welcome

Please speak to Shari or Gavin if you would like to join us.