

Ar An Imeall

When I was born divorce was illegal with marriage heavily encouraged. Homosexuality a crime - sexuality, discouraged. When I was born abortion was a word a sinner wouldn't say - women in a bit of trouble - well, they just went away. You see there were lots of words that you just didn't say - that is, without saying them in that uniquely Irish way - like have you seen the new fella - coz rumour is he's _{gay}? When I was born marital rape was legal too. With magdalene laundries open, operating in full view. I am not an old woman telling of an Éirinn fadó. This was 1990, and that is not that long ago.

But even then we were on the verge of a change. We had our first female president, which many thought was strange. Here's to you Mrs. Robinson, after the Áras was High Commissioner for Human Rights. Irish girls had a role model on which we could set our sights. A little cailín seeing her limit only in the sky, watching Mary on the telly thinking if she can, why can't I?

In the history books as well, what tales of courage there are to tell - but where's Hannah Sheehy Skeffington and Anna Catherine Parnell? In all the songs we learn of the bravery that was seen - you'd be forgiven for thinking women didn't exist in 1916. All the progress achieved cannot have been in vain, those who stood up against the marriage bar or got on the contraception train.

Or our sisters of magdalene still in need of redress; last laundry shut two decades - haven't seen half the money yet. These women, our women had their names and birthdays changed, told then by those in charge that they were the ones to blame. The site on Seán McDermott Street, it was just up for sale - it's just twenty minutes down the road from Kilmainham Gaol - but which one were we taught about? Which one have we restored so history knows it's something that we care about? Stop saying it couldn't happen again or it was just for their own karma; when half of fuckin' handmaid's tale could have been set in Lisdoonvarna.

It's always the lay people who love with compassion and turn the other cheek, whether atheist, semi-religious or in mass week after week. After all we're the ones who voted yes to marital equality - as far as the world was concerned it was quite an oddity. For little old Ireland, always so virginal and chaste, had suddenly - overnight - become a place, **for the gays**. Truth is we've always been here - on the outskirts of society. Never passing through a phase or seeking notoriety. And so three years ago our allies really did come through - now we have the right to be asked, "so... when's the wedding?" too. The most meaningful act of love we have now for all of us to enjoy. Tears shed from and for queer families - for once were ones of joy.

Never was it true that we were deviants, or sluts or in need of their saving. These were lies told to us by those in power, who are they to judge how we're behaving? Just some bullies in saints' clothing, blessed with such a loathing for our right to choose - because if we speak up, then that is how they lose.

The deafening Irish silence goes hand in hand with the sneer. How long do we have to wait to know a woman's worth is worth more than one rugby career? #IBelieveHer was a moment of recognition that the highest courts in the land still don't listen to women. As women, men, non-binary and trans we gathered in protest to show that we understand - sometimes in spite of all the evidence, some people would rather reputation still take precedence.

So we got angry, and we spoke, and we drove - HomeToVote - where we canvassed, and we marched, and we yelled out loud. We organised an entire political movement in the cloud. For the future of this tiny peripheral rural nation, caught between the lies of Brexit and a vile Trump vexation, the women of Ireland let out a loud decree - sending reverberations still being felt across the sea - making those around the globe think - if they can, why can't we?

We educated ourselves and united through time zones, having awkward conversations knowing this time we weren't alone. ***Oh, aren't the young wans always on their bloody phones!*** Yes, Brenda, we're kinda busy, we confess. ***It must be great to have all that time to go to protests. Just a***

bunch of young huns with one word across their chests.

It's not as simple as that Brenda, and we do not mean to boast - but we can smash the patriarchy **and** avo on toast.

We want to make Ireland into a fairer place, not just for girls, but for buachaillí who keep everything in, in order to save face. So much strong silent suffering and male suicide, but what do you expect when you tell one gender not to cry? When they have to attain money and sex just to know they're worth a jot. Listen to blind-boy when he says, that it really is ok to talk and it's not ok not. We need ye here, with us, for this revolution, the system's let ye down toolads, we both need a solution.

So to those who said we were too shrill, unfeeling or straight up cunts - are you starting to think that maybe you should try list'ning to us? Maybe ye need to ask na mná gránna how we did it. How when they went low, we went high, never arrogant, but never timid. How we remained respectful never neglectful of the complexity along the way. Five words; a **grassroots, intersectional, non-hierarchical, community-led campaign.**

The Ireland of tomorrow is already here today, and when Reeling in the Years is on, for '18 it will say. The landmark event was not one man's religious visit, it was a bunch of feminists against the 8th - and ya know what - we fucking did it! So that for the next generation, to the girls born today -

when they open their history books, for them, it will say - hope indeed can be wise all you need to do is try. They'll look at all that's been achieved by na mná na hÉireann and they'll cry, if these women could do all that - then why the fuck can't I?

