

FEATURE ARTICLE

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Salem Ireland, my Love

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And yes, it is with this heartfelt greeting that I first approached your shores, Ireland, a wish for peace and well-being upon the land and its people, a silent prayer for a safe and meaningful journey within your embrace.

From the very first stirrings of my heart, a deep sensitivity and a natural reaching across cultures have been woven into the fabric of my being by the language of stories, immortally captured by your great novelists and poets. Their words have opened my eyes to the quiet beauty of your secret gardens, the steadfast heart of your ancient castles and the lingering echoes in your sacred, remembered places. But, it was when our souls first met, when my feet first touched your green earth, that these celebrated spaces, these keepers of time and witnesses to eternal lives, became a boundless source of an inexplicable, vibrant and deeply felt magic within me.

And it is this very pulse of emotion that quickens whenever I am near you, whether in the lively embrace of Dublin, the warm heart of Limerick, the creative spirit of Galway or in your other towns. Yes,

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my beloved Ireland, our shared story is filled with tales both whispered and true and a timeless cultural heart beats alongside mine. Yes, my beloved Ireland, it is this ineffable connection, this silent language between us, that lifts my spirit beyond the limits of words, beyond the edges of the everyday world, beyond even the grasp of time and what we can see or touch and perceive. It is this very fascination that has drawn forth a wellspring of feelings, a harmony of memories that linger like a familiar perfume, residing in a place deeper than words, a powerful echo of a past that lives within us, surpassing mere understanding, filled with the profound emotions of your real world and the mythical beauty of your Eden-like soul.

And it is with a heart full of tenderness and a spirit humbled by your grace that I open myself to your verdant landscapes and the unwavering strength and beauty of the very creation that breathes within you, each time I return to your arms. You are a land where the ancient whispers of the earth and the quiet devotion of the heart intertwine, where old beliefs dance with the magic of Celtic tales, and where the wise ones of the past sought to understand the mysteries that lie just beyond our sight and touch. Indeed, the deepest part of me, the place where feelings are anchored, is nourished by the ancient stories that are woven into your beautiful lands – a touch of the unseen, a hint of the ‘unknowable’ that sparks my imagination and creates a bond so deep with your green heart, a bond that goes beyond just seeing beauty or understanding stories.

Then, my unforgettable Ireland, there was that moment during our first real meeting, a moment that bound my heart to yours forever. For no clear reason, tears flowed as I left your Dublin for the journey home. Yet, it felt as though you held me back, for my path was delayed at the airport, for a later departure that day. Whether it was chance or fate’s gentle hand or your own sweet magic keeping me near, it remains a cherished memory that speaks to the special and deep connection between my soul and yours. That unexpected gift of more time with you felt like an answer to my heart’s ache at leaving. And I was given the precious chance to feel those indescribable emotions again, that undeniable sense of belonging to your land, finding peace in the quiet presence of your trees, breathing

in your very essence as I walked your paths, and simply smiling in the warmth of your spirit.

Yes, my Ireland, my love, it is this deep, sensory experience that has tied my heart to your sacred places with bonds that will never break. There is no need for a reason, only this profound and beautiful feeling, an inexplicable harmony with your very air, your very being. I treasure this peace and joy that I find only with you. Indeed, it is a powerful testament to the deep mark you have made on my fragile soul. Even those who know me see this clear connection, this undeniable love I have for you, my Ireland! Who can ever truly understand the depths of such a love?

Visiting your places of remembrance, from weathered headstones to grand memorials, was never an act of mere sightseeing, but a pilgrimage of respect. I moved in quiet contemplation, feeling the echoes of lives lived and lost, honouring the stories held within the earth. Undoubtedly, I approached them with a deep sense of reverence, a feeling so ingrained that I remember, even once while visiting such a place with friends of different backgrounds, I felt compelled to voice the importance of respecting the silence and the stories held within the earth. Though my words were spoken in French and Arabic, languages the local guide might not have understood directly, my sentiment resonated. He turned to the group and echoed my plea: 'Please respect the dead.' It was a moment that underscored a shared understanding, a universal acknowledgement of the sacred nature of these spaces, a principle that guides my steps on your hallowed ground.

More than just admiring your beauty and history, Ireland, I feel woven into your very essence. It is as if a part of me has always belonged here, and each return is a reunion with a long-lost part of myself. I am not a foreigner in your land, but a fellow traveller, a soul sister on its ancient paths, healing my torn halves. As generations pass and families journey across continents, the whispers of our origins can fade, becoming faint, distant echoes in the chambers of memory. Yet, in that Galway souvenir/bookshop, the past spoke again with a clarity that transcended time and distance or space. The revelation of part of my family's original name etched in Ireland's ancient records felt like a reclaiming, a remembering of lost roots that

had perhaps been unknowingly calling to me across the years. It was a poignant reminder that even when the conscious memory of our origins blurs, the threads of heritage still weave their way into the reconstruction of our being, leading our hearts home.

Even in the intricate tapestry of history, Ireland and Algeria find unexpected threads intertwined. From the complex story of Richard Joyce's time in Cherchell to the enduring legend of the Claddagh ring, born from a love that transcended captivity in Algiers, these connections, both shadowed and romantic, hint at a deeper, perhaps even fated, relationship between our lands. Knowing these stories, I feel my own connection to you, Ireland, which resonates on levels I am only beginning to understand, a sense of belonging that feels both deeply personal and somehow echoed in the currents of history. There are whispers of connections stretching across vast distances. It is as if this enduring emblem of connection speaks to the deeper, often unseen, threads that bind our hearts and histories to claim my own heritage. Even more, knowing the struggles for independence that have marked both our lands, I feel a resonance with the spirit of resilience that defines you, Ireland, a spirit that perhaps finds a distant echo in the heart of Algeria, too.

Perhaps this profound sense of belonging is not just a meeting of hearts, but a reunion with a long-forgotten part of myself, a whisper from the past calling me home. And in the depths of my heart, I truly believe that a part of my own story is intertwined with yours, Ireland, a whisper from ancestors carried across time and sea. But it was through the warmth and open heart of my Irish friend that I truly began to understand the spirit of this land. Despite our different cultural paths, and beyond the more recent layers of our cultural identities, I discovered a fascinating resonance with my Irish friend, a kinship that felt ancient and profound. Perhaps, it is in the deep roots of our respective pasts, in the echoes of ancient pagan beliefs that honoured the land and the cycles of life, that we found this unexpected common ground, a reminder of a shared human history that transcends the boundaries of time and tradition.

My cherished Irish love, it is not a farewell, but only an authentic love surviving or rather floating with defiance across time and space,

a love that transcends earthly separation, residing in that thin place – a Barzakh of the Heart awaiting its true belonging.

And yet, having been granted the precious key (visa) to your shores for two years, my heart soared with anticipation, Ireland. Though Covid circumstances beyond my control limited my time within your embrace, the moments I did experience only deepened my yearning to return and fully immerse myself in your beauty and spirit. That trip would be a profound pilgrimage to a country that already holds a piece of my soul, walking again and again the grounds of Trinity College which has nurtured the literary giants I so admire or imagining wandering the vibrant musical streets of Temple Bar or simply giving the opportunity to stand in awe of the Book of Kells, and feeling the salty rebooting greetings of the wild Atlantic coast.