

Granuaile in historical novels

'Ireland in Schools'

1. *Granuaile. The Pirate Queen*
by Llywelyn, Morgan, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-578-2
2. *The Ghost of Grania O'Malley*
by Morpurgo, Michael, Egmont, 0-74974-691-2
3. Extra
Red Hugh. The Kidnap of Hugh O'Donnell
by Lisson, Deborah, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-604-5

1. *Granuaile. The Pirate Queen*

by Llywelyn, Morgan, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-578-2

Grace O'Malley, alias Granuaile, pirate & politician, c. 1530-1603, is one of Ireland's most infamous figures. She was, however, more than the 'pirate queen' of Irish legend. She was a courageous woman who stood up for her rights during the turbulent Tudor conquest of Ireland.

This inventive, if uncritical, historical novel is an excellent source for storytelling. The narrative is interweaved with imaginary letters between Grace and her son, Tibert, which capture a lesser-known side of the Pirate Queen.



June, the Year of Our Lord 1575, Clare Island

My dear Toby,

At this season I am usually at sea. A slight injury - nothing your need worry about - is keeping me on the island a little longer. My shoulder is giving me some trouble but my right hand is undamaged, thank God. So I can write to you.

Are you well, my son? Are the priests teaching you as I have instructed them? Learn your letters, study Latin, and memorise the names of the major seaports. Your older brothers by Donal O'Flaherty are merely simply warriors, all strength and shouting. I want more than that for you. Against an enemy as powerful as the English it is necessary to fight with one's brains. Fortunately you and I both inherited good brains.

It saddens me to tell you that my beloved Dubhdara is dying. Your grandfather is like an ancient oak tree that has fallen in the forest and is slowly crumbling away. I continue to captain the fleet and support his people. I cannot say what the future holds, but be assured I shall do my best.

Always,
Granuaile

2. *The Ghost of Grania O'Malley*

by Morpurgo, Michael, Egmont, 0-74974-691-2

While not a historical novel, this fantasy (especially pp 67-70 and pp 196-203) has engaged children and informed their work on Grace O'Malley in History lessons and the Literacy Hour.

Sixteenth-century Grace O'Malley visits the present to help Jessie Parsons and her American cousin, Jack, preserve the Big Hill, the heart of Clare Island, special, beautiful, the perfect place. There is gold in the Big Hill. It would make the islanders rich, but to claim it would mean destroying the hill for ever. Jessie and Jack cannot bear for this to happen. Can they save it before it is too late? They can, but only with the aid of a secret ally - the ghost of Grace O'Malley.



Extract 1: Meeting Grania (*The Ghost of Grania O'Malley*, pp 67-70)

The sunlight danced over the rock pool and seemed to be inviting them to drink. Jack was there before she was. He cupped his hands under the spring, caught the water and drank it. Jessie tried it the same way too, but could not keep her fingers tight enough together to hold the water. So she knelt down and put her mouth to the surface of the pool, as she had the last time she was up there. She drank long and deep, her eyes closed until she'd had enough. She wiped her mouth and watched the reflected clouds moving across the pool. She was remembering the earring and how she had found it there before. And then she knew she wasn't remembering it at all, she was looking directly at it. It was there, right in front of her eyes, lying at the bottom of the pool. It was like an echo in her mind, this feeling of having been somewhere before and then the same thing happening, in exactly the same place and in exactly the same way, like a dream, only clearer, more real. She reached down into the water, shattering the clouds, but Jack's hand was quicker than hers.

'Jeez, what's this?' he said, dangling the earring in front of her eyes.

'What does it look like?' a voice spoke from behind them, a voice Jessie recognised at once. 'You'll be needing the pair, I thought.' They turned. She was the woman from the mirror. She was the woman from Jessie's dream. And she was here and now and barefoot on the rock, her hair all about her face.

'Well, have you no manners at all?' she said. 'You're gawping at me like a pair of gasping salmon. Look around you. It's just like you said, Jack. Isn't this the most perfect place in the entire world? My mountain this, my hill. I fought for it, we all did. We spilled good red Irish blood for it, and I'll not let them do it. I won't. But I'll need help.' And then to Jack: 'That was a fine speech you made. Did you mean it?' Jack nodded, backing away now and taking Jessie with him.

'Now where do you think you're going to?' She sprang down off the rock, lithe like a tiger, a sword hanging from her broad leather belt. She was about Jessie's mother's age, a little older perhaps and certainly stronger. There was a wild and weather-beaten look about her. 'Would I hurt you? Would I? Haven't I just given you my own earrings? Gold they are, Spanish gold. I filched them myself from the wreck of the Santa Felicia, a great Armada galleon that washed itself up on our rocks - a while ago now. And there's a whole lot more where they came from, my life's winnings you might say - or what's left of them anyway.'

She drew her sword and flourished it at the sea. 'These are my waters. You sail in my waters and you pay your dues. I took from anyone who came by, English, Spanish, Portuguese - all the same to me, all perfectly fair and square and above board. But if they didn't pay, well then, I took what was mine. Wouldn't you? A poor pirate's got to earn her crust somehow. How else is she to live into her old age? Tell me that if you will.'

Jessie sat down because she had to, because her legs wanted her to. It could not be what Jessie was thinking, because what she was thinking was impossible; but then maybe she had to believe the impossible might just be possible after all. The woman now striding towards her said she was a pirate, that the Big Hill was her mountain. It could be no one else. It had to be ... but then it couldn't be. She had been buried in the abbey hundreds of years ago. Jessie had seen the gravestone. They had read about her at school, the Pirate Queen of Clare Island. Mrs O'Leary's pub down by the quay was named after her.

Jessie screwed up all her courage, and then spoke. 'You're not. . . you're not Grania O'Malley, are you?'

'And who else would I be?' she said.

Extract 2: Grania to the rescue (*The Ghost of Grania O'Malley*, pp 196-203)

High in the cab, the driver of the first Earthbuster recognised the lady in front of him. She was the same one who had screamed at him and kicked at his digger. The boy was there too, the American boy, and the girl with the limp beside him, arms linked. He lowered his scoop to the ground like the others, an eye on Mr Murphy, watching for the signal to stop. The plan had been clear. They would dig round them, and then move in slowly, scraping away the earth at their feet, just close enough to scare them. But it wasn't working. Frightened or not, they weren't moving. None of them were. Some of the children were crying, mothers and fathers holding them now, trying to comfort them. The digger driver thought of his children back home in Dublin, and he did not like what he was doing. He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't go on.

He was reaching for the ignition key when he saw them out of the corner of his eye. From out of nowhere they seemed to come: twenty, thirty men maybe. Swords drawn, they were striding through the circle, but somehow without breaking it. Then some of them were heading straight towards him. The digger driver knew them at once for what they must be, even though it was impossible in this day and age, quite impossible. Pirates, pirates straight out of the books he read his children. Baggy breeches, barefoot, some of them bearded, and even one with a black eyepatch. They were charging now, swords slicing the air, and yelling a bloodcurdling war-cry that sent warm shivers of fear up his back. The digger driver could not move. He wanted to run, but terror had frozen him to his seat. He looked towards Michael Murphy for help; but Michael Murphy was standing there, aghast, the blood drained from his face.

There was a flag fluttering from the centre of the circle now, a black flag with a red pig on it; and beside the flag stood a tall figure of a woman with a mass of black hair, and there was a sword in her hand too. The pirates were all around his digger now. They were climbing up on to it. One of them had his hand on the cab door, and wrenched it open.

'Nice morning,' said the pirate. 'I wonder if you'd care to step down for a little while?' There was an unpleasant smile on his face. He had very few teeth, and those he did have were like yellow claws. 'Out,' he said. The digger driver did not hesitate, and neither did any of the others. Every digger was soon occupied by pirates, who clambered all over them, waving their swords in wild abandon and whooping in triumph. Michael Murphy and his uniformed army were entirely surrounded by pirates, who tickled them with the points of their swords, under their arms, under their chins, teasing them with terror.

That was when the woman by the flag spoke up. 'Easy boys, easy boys, easy . . . We wouldn't want to frighten them, would we? Well, maybe just a little we would, but not so it hurts, eh?' She turned to Mister Barney. 'Hello, Mister Barney. And how are you this fine morning?' Mister Barney tried to say something. His mouth moved but no sound came out. 'Mister Barney knows well enough who I am - we've met before - and so do Jess and Jack.' She smiled at Jessie.

'By the look on your faces, there's some of you maybe wondering who we are. Well, I'll tell you. My name is Grania O'Malley. And these are my men, my boys. This is our island. This is our hill you're standing on, mine and my forebears', mine and my descendants'. And you,' she went on, sweeping her sword all around her, 'you are my descendants. You are too, Michael Murphy, and you should be ashamed of yourself.' She was pointing her sword straight at him. 'No one owns land, Michael Murphy. You look after it, you protect it for those who come after you, that's all. Can you not understand that?

That is why I'll not let you cut off the head of this hill, why I won't let you tear the heart out of it, not for a pot of gold, not for anything.' Jessie wanted to run to her and hug her, out of sheer relief, out of pure love.

'Now, as I see it, Michael Murphy,' Grania O'Malley went on, 'the good people of Clare have given this a lot of thought. Maybe some of them have come to their senses more slowly than others, but no matter. They have decided they want you to leave and take your machines with you, that they want to keep the Big Hill as it is. They asked you nicely - I heard them. But you didn't listen. If you had listened, then there'd have been no need for me to go sticking my piratical nose in, would there now? As it is, I'm going to have to give a little helping hand.' And, with a wink at Jessie, she said, 'You'll enjoy this, I think, Jess.' Then she whipped up her sword and flashed it above her head. 'Right, boys. You know what to do. But take care now.'

All the engines started up at once. Every digger had a crew of pirates, one in the cab and others sitting on the sides, legs dangling. Grania O'Malley took up her flag and strode forward. 'They've been dying to do this ever since they saw those machines. Little boys at heart, just little boys.'

The Earthbusters were on the move, manoeuvring so that they were soon lined up and facing towards the cliff-tops, the pirates hanging on to anything they could. The engines revved to full, thunderous throttle; and then, as if unleashed, they lurched forward into the bracken, bumping over the rocks, in a helter-skelter race for the cliffs. The pirates leapt off this way and that, diving off the sides and out of the cabs, into the bracken and rolling away. Everyone was rushing to look. Jessie was just in time to see the first of the Earthbusters flying out over the cliff and somersaulting through the air. The others were soon to follow. Jack was hoping there would be massive explosions, but there weren't. Instead, there were four spectacular splashes, and a lot of steaming and hissing, as the diggers sank slowly into the sea and disappeared.

It was a moment or two before they all realised what had happened, before the cheering began. When it did, it was deafening. Everyone jumped up and down and hugged each other, everyone that is except Michael Murphy and his blue and orange army. Jessie felt herself swept off her feet, and then she was swinging in the air, round and round and round until she was giddy with it and begged to be let down. Grania O'Malley set her on her feet and held her fast by the shoulders so she didn't tumble over.

'I think,' said Grania O'Malley, 'I think the enemy has decided they've had enough. Take a look.' And sure enough, there wasn't a sign either of Michael Murphy, nor of his blue-uniformed security guards, nor of the orange-overalled drivers. The battle was over, over before it had begun.

One by one the pirates gathered around Grania O'Malley from all over the Big Hill. One of them said he had never had so much fun in all his life - nor since, he added with a laugh. Grania O'Malley was talking to Jessie's mother and Mister Barney. Everyone else, Jessie noticed, was keeping their distance from her. They stood together in hushed and huddled groups, eyes wide with wonder and fear.

'Well, you'll not be needing us any more, will you?' Grania O'Malley was saying. 'I think we'd better be going. No sensible ghost wants to outstay her welcome. Now where's that daughter of yours, and where's Jack?' She turned, saw them and held out her arms. Like it or not, and he wasn't at all sure he did, Jack was clasped in an enveloping hug. 'Give my best to America when you see it, Jack,' she said, and she released him. 'Maybe I'll pay you a visit one day. How would that be?'

'Great,' said Jack. 'I know a lot of people who'd like to meet you.'

'We'll see, we'll see,' said Grania O'Malley. And she smiled sadly down at Jessie. 'All good things have to come to an end, Jessie. Look after the place for me, won't you?' She bent down, put her arms round Jessie and held her close. Jessie clung to her. 'I'll be seeing you,' Grania O'Malley whispered. And then, quite suddenly, there was nothing to cling to any more. Jessie looked around her. Grania O'Malley was gone, and her pirates with her.

Everyone thought they had gone for good. They were still standing, stunned by all they had seen, by all that had happened, when Marion grasped Jessie by the arm and pointed out to sea. The galley, under full sail, was moving out over the mist-covered sea towards Clew Bay, towards Rockfleet in the distance, the oars dipping together. Grania O'Malley was standing in the prow of the galley, her flag fluttering above her, her hand raised in farewell. The galley sailed on, drawn slowly into the mist, until they saw it no more.

Jessie felt Jack beside her. 'We won't see her again, will we?' she said.

'Never can tell, not with her,' Jack replied.

'She wanted me to give you this,' said Jessie, taking his hand and laying the arrowhead on his open palm.

'Where? Where did she find it?'

Jessie shrugged her shoulders. 'She didn't say.' She thought it safer to change the subject before he could ask any more about it. 'We've done it, haven't we?' She looked up at him and smiled. 'We've saved the Big Hill.' But Jack turned away and looked out to the open sea.

3. **Red Hugh. The Kidnap of Hugh O'Donnell**

by Lisson, Deborah, O'Brien Press, 0-86278-604-5

<http://www.obrien.ie/book254.cfm> for publisher's study guides

This relates imaginatively the extraordinary true story of Red Hugh O'Donnell (1572-1602) - kidnap, gaol, dungeons and escape. Ireland in 1587 was a tough place. The old Irish clans struggled desperately to hold on to their lands. With the Spanish Armada threatening her in the background, the English queen, Elizabeth I, set out to subdue them.

A few weeks before his fifteenth birthday, Red Hugh was captured and taken to Dublin Castle - held as hostage to ensure the good behaviour of his father, chief of the powerful O'Donnell clan of Donegal. After several years, one freezing winter's night the chance of escape seemed to come at last, but there were great risks ...



In the Irish curriculum, the novel is used to debate aspects of personal development and education for citizenship, highlighting as it does the clash between English and Gaelic cultures.

Before that opportunity to escape arose, however, Red Hugh had several interviews with his captor, the Lord Deputy, Fitzwilliam, who tried to win the young man over to the English side and to abandon his Roman Catholicism in favour of Protestantism. One such interview took place at Christmas.

... Despite his bravado he [Hugh] had a battle to hide his fear when he was ushered into the Lord Deputy's presence.

But Fitzwilliam, it seemed, was in a generous mood. He greeted the boy with a smile and beckoned him forward, waving Seagar [the Constable of Dublin Castle] back to wait by the door. The Lord Deputy was seated behind a huge oak table, and he had someone with him - Miler Magrath, the Archbishop of Cashel. Magrath had been a Catholic before he had seen the light - and been well rewarded for his conversion. The Archbishop smiled unctuously at his young countryman. Hugh scowled.

'Be seated, Master O'Donnell,' invited the Lord Deputy. Hugh looked at the low stool, deliberately placed, he suspected, so the two men would be able to look down at him. He debated whether to refuse it, decided it was not worth the effort and sat.

The Lord Deputy leaned back in his chair and studied him, much as one might appraise a puppy presented for inspection. Hugh stared back. If Perrot had resembled a bull, then Fitzwilliam; he decided, was a fox - nervous and fussy, with sharp eyes and a shrewd, narrow face. He remembered what Hugh mac Ferdoragh had said about the man - that he was not wealthy, and might therefore be bribable. Was it true? Did those eyes reflect greed or only meanness?

Finally, as Fitzwilliam continued to stare at him, his curiosity turned to irritation. 'Is there something amiss with my face, my Lord Deputy?' he demanded. 'Have I leprosy perhaps - or the first signs of smallpox?'

Fitzwilliam only smiled. 'On the contrary, Master O'Donnell, it is a very pleasing face - well-favoured and intelligent. I can see why your father sets such store by you.'

'Then why do you keep me a prisoner in your castle when I should be at his side?'

'Come now, Master Hugh, we have been through this before. It was not I who sent that ship to Lough Swilly.'

'But it is you who keeps me here. Does that make you less guilty?'

'Enough.' Fitzwilliam was starting to lose patience. 'You are here by Her Majesty's command. You know as well as I do, the custom of hostage is a perfectly legal one. Does not your own father take pledges from his client chieftains?'

'Not by abduction. I am not a pledge, I am a prisoner.'

'You draw a fine distinction.'

'I do not. Hugh mac Ferdoragh gave pledges last time he came to Dublin. Were they locked up in the gate-tower and threatened with chains if they caused trouble? No. They were lodged in the city with only their word to hold them.'

Fitzwilliam pretended to consider this statement. 'And would you give your word if it were asked of you?'

'Would you take it if I gave it?'

The Lord Deputy did not answer and Hugh knew he had won that round. Archbishop Magrath broke the silence. Folding his hands over his Book of Common Prayer, which lay on the table in front of him, he said, speaking in Latin for Fitzwilliam's benefit, 'I was grieved, Master O'Donnell, to learn that you and your friends have refused spiritual consolation.'

It took Hugh a moment to realise what he was talking about. It was hardly the way he would have described the

Christmas fiasco [when Hugh and his friends were forced to attend a Protestant service in St Patrick's Cathedral]. 'We have not refused it, Master Magrath,' he said coldly. 'We have been denied it.'

'Indeed? That is not how it was told to me, but if it be true, it can soon be remedied.'

'You mean we may have a priest to say mass for us?'

'Indeed, I do not. I mean there are many good churchmen in Dublin who would be pleased to instruct you in the true faith.'

'We do not want your heresies. We want our mass.'

'You are being impertinent, boy,' broke in Fitzwilliam. 'And it is your popish mass that is heresy - seditious blasphemy gabbled in an incomprehensible tongue.'

'I do not find Latin incomprehensible.'

'Perhaps not - you have been taught to speak it. But what of your humbler clansmen? Of what benefit to them are scriptures read in a language they cannot understand?'

Hugh stared at him. Was the man really as stupid as he appeared? He stretched a hand across the table: 'Show me the book you use for your services,' he demanded of Magrath. The Archbishop handed him his prayer book. Hugh opened it. He turned a couple of pages, then held it up triumphantly to Fitzwilliam: 'You see,' he said. 'It is all in English.'

The Lord Deputy looked perplexed. 'Well, of course it is. What did you expect?'

Mother of God! This was worse than teaching the catechism to a six-year-old. 'My clansmen, those humble folk who do not speak Latin, they do not speak English either - and no more do I.'

Light dawned in Fitzwilliam's eyes. He smiled reassuringly. 'You need not be ashamed of your ignorance. What opportunity have you had to learn better - or your countrymen - living the remote and savage lives you do? But all that is going to change. It is Her Majesty's greatest wish that you should be taught and civilised.'

'Civilised! And . . . and it is her belief that to speak English is to be civilised?'

'Of course. That is the start. With the language come the customs and the manners. Once you understand our ways you will see how much better they are. We will teach you to build proper houses, and towns and ...'

I am going to scream, thought Hugh. It is like beating your head against a wall. 'We do not want your towns,' he said patiently, 'nor your houses nor your customs nor your language. We are...' He took a deep breath. 'WE - ARE - NOT - ENGLISH.'

Fitzwilliam's understanding smile expanded across his whole face. 'Of course you are not, but that is not your fault. We shall just have to do the best we can.'

Hugh stood up. Blood sang in his brain. He watched his own hands lay the book down on the table. He saw them open it and tear out half a dozen pages. He watched his fingers rip the paper into tiny shreds and fling them like a snow-storm into Fitzwilliam's face. 'To hell with your English prayer book,' he exploded. 'And to hell with everything else English, too.' And he turned to storm out of the room.

Seagar, who had been waiting patiently by the door, grabbed him by the collar and one wrist, jerked his arm up behind his back and twisted him round to face the Lord Deputy. Fitzwilliam stared at him in amazement. Then 'Put him back in his cell and let him cool his heels there for a few more days,' he ordered the Constable. 'Let us hope it restores him to his senses.'

Seagar marched the boy out. Fitzwilliam sat in bewilderment staring at the place where Hugh had stood. What on earth had he said or done to provoke such an extraordinary outburst? He wondered whether to ask the Archbishop, but decided against it. Magrath was Irish himself and, despite his loyalty, not quite to be relied on. Fitzwilliam recalled his predecessor's assessment of young O'Donnell. Well, Sir John, he thought grimly, it seems there is, after all, one point on which we both agree. You can do your best for these barbarians - dress them decently, educate them, give them a veneer of civilisation - but then, just when you think you have them eating out of your hand; some unpredictable little incident sets them off again and they revert straight back to their old savagery