

Grace O'Malley: poems & songs

Granuaile by A. Chambers, Wolfhound Press, 0-86327-631-8, pp 179-192

Granuaile

Hart: *Irish Pedigrees*, vol. II, p. 675 (From the Irish)

There stands a tower by the Atlantic side
A grey old tower, by storm and sea-waves beat
Perch'd on a cliff, beneath it yawne wide
A lofty cavern of yore a fit retreat
For pirates galleys; altho', now, you'll meet
Nought but the seal and wild gull; from that cave
A hundred steps do upwards lead your feet
Unto a lonely chamber! — Bold and brave
Is he who climbs that stair, all slippery from the wave.

I sat there on an evening. In the west,
Amid the waters, sank the setting sun:
While clouds, like parting friends, about him prest,
Clad in their fleecy garbs, of gold and dun;
And silence was around me — save the hum,
Of the lone and wild bee, or the curlew's cry.
And lo! Upon me did a vision come,
Of her who built that tower, in days gone by;
And in that dream, behold! I saw a building high.

A stately hull — lofty and carved the roof —
Was deck'd with silken banners fair to see.
The hanging velvet, from Genou's woof,
And wrought with Tudor roses curiously;
At its far end did stand a canopy,
Shading a chair of state, on which was seen
A ladye fair, with look of majesty,
Amid a throng, 'yclad in costly sheen —
Nobles and gallant Knights proclaim her England's
Queen.

The sage Elizabeth; and by her side
Were group'd her counsellors, with calm, grave air,
Burleigh and Walsingham, with others, tried
In wisdom and in war, and sparkling there, Like
Summer butterflies, were damsels fair,
Beautiful and young: behind a trusty band Of stalwart
yeomanry, with watchful care,
The portal guard, while nigher to its stand
Usher and page, ready
to ape with willing hand.

A Tucket sounds, and lo! There enters now
A strange group, in saffron tunics drest:
A female at their head, whose step and brow
Herald her rank, and, calm and self possest,
Onward she came, alone through England's best,
With careless look, and bearing free yet high,
Tho' gentle dames their titterings scarce repress,
Noting her garments as she passed them by;
None laughed again who met that stem and flashing eye.

Restless and dark, its sharp and rapid look
Showd's a fierce spirit, prone a wrong to feel,
And quicker to revenge it. As a book.
That sun-burnt brow did fearless thoughts reveal;

And in her girdle was a skeyne of steel;
Her crimson mantle, a gold brooch did bind;
Her flowing garments reached unto her heel;
Her hair-part fell in tresses unconfined,
And part, a silver bodkin did fasten up behind.

'Twas not her garb that caught the gazer's eye —
Tho' strange, 'twas rich, and, after its fashion, good —
But the wild grandeur of her mien-erect and high.
Before the English Queen she dauntless stood,
And none her bearing there could scorn as rude;
She seemed as one well used to power — one that hath
Dominion over men of savage mood,
And dared the tempest in its midnight wrath,
And thro' opposing billows cleft her fearless path.

And courteous greeting Elizabeth then pays,
And bids her welcome to her English land
And humble hall. Each looked with curious gaze
Upon the other's face, and felt they stand
Before a spirit like their own. Her hand
The stranger raised — and pointing where all pale,
Thro' the high casement, came the sunlight bland,
Gilding the scene and group with rich avail;
Thus, to the English Sov'reign, spoke proud 'Grana Wale'.

Queen of the Saxons! From the distant west
I come; from Achill steep and Island Clare,
Where the wild eagle builds 'mid clouds, his nest,
And Ocean flings its billows in the air.
I come to greet you in your dwelling fair.
Led by your fame — lone sitting in my cave.
In sea — beat Donna — it hath reached me there,
Theme of the minstrel's song; and then I gave
My galley to the wind, and crossed the dark green wave.

'Health to thee, ladye!' — let your answer be
Health to our Irish land; for evil men
Do vex her sorely, and have buklar'd thee
Abettor of their deeds; lyeing train,
That cheat their mistress for the love of gain,
And wrong their trust — aught else I little reck,
Alike to me, the mountain and the glen —
The castle's rampart or the galley's deck;
But thou my country spare — your foot is on her neck.

Thus brief and bold, outspake that ladye stern,
And all stood silent thro' that crowded hall;
While proudly glared each proud and manly kern
Attendant on their mistress. Then courtly all
Elizabeth replies, and soothing fall
Her words, and pleasing to the Irish ear —
Fair promises — that she would soon recall
Her evil servants. Were these words sincere?
That promise kept? Let Erin answer with a tear!

Grana Weal

James Hardiman: *Irish Minstrelsy*, vol. II

O thou that are sprung from the flow'r of the land,
Whose virtues endear and whose talents command;
When our foemen are banished, how then wilt thou feel
That the King of the right shall espouse Grana Weal.

O'er the high hills of Erin what bonfires shall blaze,
What libations be pour'd forth! — What festival days! —
What minstrels and monks with one heart-pulse of zeal,
Sing and pray for the King and his own Grana Weal!

The monarch of millions is riding the sea,
His revenge cannot sleep, and his guards will not flee;
No cloud shall the pride of our nobles conceal,
When the foes are dispersed that benight Grana Weal.

The mighty in thousands are pouring from Spain,
The Scots, the true Scots shall come back again;
To far-distant exile no more shall they steal,
But waft the right King to his fond Grana Weal.

Raise your hearts and exult, my beloved at my words,
Your eyes to your King, and your hand to your swords! —
The Highlands shall send forth the bonneted Gael,
To grace the glad nuptials of Grana Weal.

And Louis, and Charles and the heaven-guided Pope,
And the King of the Spaniards shall strengthen our hope;
One religion — one kindred — one soul shall they feel,
For our heart enthroned Exile arid Grana Weal.

With weeping and wailing, and sorrow and shame —
And anguish of heart that no pity dare claim;
The craven English churls shall all powerless kneal
To the home-restored Stuart and Grana Weal.

Our halls will rejoice with friendship and cheer,
And our hearts be as free from reproach as from fear;
The hungry adventurer shall pine from the meal,
He long lapped from the life-stream of Grana Weal.

Ah! Knowest thou the maiden all beauteous and fair,
Whom her merciless foes have left plundered and bare?
The force of my emblem too well cant thou feel,
For that suffering lorn one is our Grana Weal.

But the nobles shall bring back the true king again
And justice long slighted will come in his train;
The bullets shall fly — and the cannons shall peal —
And our Charles victorious espouse Grana Weal.

Grace O'Malley

Sir Samuel Ferguson

She left the close-air'd, land of trees,
And proud MacWilliam's palace,
For clear, bare Clare's health-salted breeze,
Her oarsmen and her galleys
And where, beside the bending strand
The rock and billow wrestle
Between the deep sea and the land
She built her island Castle

The Spanish captain, sailing by
For Newport, with amazement
Beheld the cannon'd longship lie
Moor'd to the lady's casement,
And, covering coin and cup of gold
In haste their hatches under,
They whisper'd 'Tis a pirate's hold;
She sails the seas for plunder.'

But no: 'twas not for sordid spoil
Of barque or sea-board borough
She plough'd, with unfatiguing toil,
The fluent — rolling furrow;
Delighting, on the broad back'd deep,
To feel the quivering galley
Strain up the opposing hill, and sweep
Down the withdrawing valley

Or, sped before a driving blast,
By following seas uplifted,
Catch, from the huge heaps heaving past,
And from the spray they drifted
And from the winds that toss'd the crest
Of each wide-shouldering giant,
The smack of freedom and the zest
Of rapturous life defiant.

For, oh the mainland time was pent
In close constraint and striving,
So many aims together bent
On winning and on thriving;
There was no room for generous case,
No sympathy for candour: —
And so she left Burke's buzzing trees,
And all his stony splendour.

For Erin yet had fields to spare
Where Clew her cincture gathers
Isle — gemmed; and kindly clans were there,
The fosterers of her fathers:
Room there for careless feet to roam
Secure from minions' peeping
For fearless mirth to find a home
And sympathetic weeping;

And generous ire and frank disdain
To speak the mind, nor ponder
How this in England,
that in Spain, Might suit to tell; as yonder,
Where daily on the slippery dais
By thwarting interests chequer'd
State gamesters played the social chess
Of politic Clanrickard.

Nor wanting quite the lovely isle
In civic life's adornings:
The Brehon's Court, might well beguile
A learned lady's mornings.
Quaint through the clamorous claim, and rude
The pleading that convy'd it,
Right conscience made the judgment good,
And loyal love obey'd it.

And music was sweeter far
For ears of native nurture,
Than virginals at Castlebar
To tinkling touch of courtier,
Where harpers good in hall struck up
The planxty's gay commotion,
Or, pipers scream'd from pennon'd poop
Their piobrach over ocean.

And sweet, to see, their ruddy bloom
Whom ocean's friendly distance
Preserved still unenslaved; for whom
No tasking if existence
Made this one rich and that one poor,
In gold's illusive treasure,
But all, of easy life secure,
Were rich in wealth of leisure.

Rich in the Muse's pensive hour,
In genial hour for neighbour,
Rich in young mankind's happy power
To live with little labour;
The wise, free way of life, indeed,
That still, with charm adaptive,
Reclaims and tames the alien greed,
And takes the conqueror captive.

Nor only life's unclouded looks
To compensate its rudeness;
Amends there were in holy books,
In offices of goodness,
In cares above the transient scene
Of little gains and honours,
That well repaid the Island Queen
Her loss of urban manners.

Sweet, when crimson sunsets glow'd,
As earth and sky grow grander,
Adown the grass'd, unechoing road
Atlantic ward to wander,
Some Kinsman's humbler hearth to seek,
Some sick-bed side, it may be,
Or, onward reach, with footsteps meek,
The low, grey, lovely, abbey:

And, where stories stone beneath
The guise of plant and creature,
Had fused the harder lines
of faith In easy forms of nature;
Such forms, on tell the master's pains
'Mong Roslin's carven
glories, Or hint the faith of Pictish' Thanes
On standing stones of Forres;

The Branch; the weird cherubic Beasts;
The Hart by hounds o'ertaken;
Or, intimating mystic feasts,
The self-resorbent Dragon; —
Mute symbols, though with power endow'd
For finer dogmas' teaching,
Than clerk might tell to carnal crowd
In homily or preaching: —

Sit; and while heaven's refulgent show
Grew airier and more tender,
And ocean gleaming floor below
Reflected loftier splendour,
Suffused with light, of lingering faith
And ritual lights reflection,
Discourse of birth, and life, and death,
And of the resurrection.

But chiefly sweet from morn to eve,
From eve to clear-eyed morning,
The presence of the felt reprieve,
From strangers' note and scorning:
No prying, proud, intrusive foes
To pity and offend her: —
Such was the life the lady chose,
Such choosing, we commend her.

Granuaile

James Hardiman: *Irish Minstrelsy*, vol. II, p. 65

The following song originated in Co. Leitrim around Ballinamuck and it is thought that it originated about 1798 with the survivors from Mayo of the Battle at Ballinamuck between the Franco-Irish forces and the English.

As the sunlight in its glory
Ever shines on fair Clew Bay
And Croagh Patrick
old and hoary Rises o'er the ruins grey
As the streamlets in the meadows
In their pride come dancing down
Nestled close among the mountains
Stands pleasant Newport Town.

Just a mile from where the turrets
Of the ancient town arise
And the frowning peak of Nephin
Soars in grandeur to the skies
Lie a massive heap of ruins
In their loneliness sublime
Though scattered and dismantled now
By tyranny and time

'Twas a proud and stately castle
In the years of long ago
When the dauntless Grace O'Malley
Ruled a queen in fair Mayo.
And from Bernham's lofty summit
To the waves of Galway Bay
And from Castlebar to Ballintra
Her unconquered flag held sway.

She had strongholds on her headlands
And brave galleys on the sea
And no warlike chief or viking
E'er had bolder heart than she.
She unfurled her country's banner
High o'er battlement and mast
And 'gainst all the might of England
Kept it flying 'til the last.

The armies of Elizabeth
Invaded her on land
Her warships followed on her track
And watched by many a stand
But she swept her foes before her
On the land and on the sea
And the flag of Grace O'Malley
Waved defiant, proud and free.

On the walls of Carrick Clooney
As the Summer sun went down
And its last bright rays were fading
On the spires of Newport town.
To the watchmen on the ramparts
There appeared in long array
A band of English spearmen
By the waters of Clew Bay.

To the walls flew Grace O'Malley
With her clansmen at her side
Who had often met the foemen
On the land and on the tide.
But she saw the marshalled strength
Of the English coming on
And the colour of their armour
That in polished brightness shone.

Soon before the frowning battlements
The English columns came
Whilst on the walls before them
Stood many a bristling gun.
Then forwards towards the barbican
A herald quickly came
And demanded free admittance
In the English monarch's name.

He said 'My Royal Mistress
Sends her men-at-arms and me
With greetings good to all her friends
Who true and loyal be.
Her liegeman, Lord Hal Sydney
With all his spears awaits
For you to open wide to him
The Barbican and gates!

'So tell your Royal mistress,'
The dauntless Grace replied,
'That she and all her men-at-arms
Are scornfully defied.
She may own the fertile valley
Where the Foyle and Liffey flow
But tell her Grace O'Malley
Is unconquered in Mayo.'

'Our flag upon the battlements
Is to the breeze outthrown
And with God's grace we'll keep it there
In spite of Queen and throne.
There's many a brave O'Malley here
With me to man the walls
And rally round the flag we love
Until the last man falls!

'We want no English hirelings here
No soldiers of the Crown
We falter not before their spears
Nor cower beneath their frown.
No! Clansmen, let your warcry ring
Defiance on the gale
And greet those braggart Saxons
With a shower of Irish hail.'

Then sprang upon the Britons
With many a loud hurrah
A band of fierce and rugged men
Well brazen in many a fray.
On every tower and battlement
The Irish kern appears
And fiercely flash their guns upon
The foe's advancing spears.

The dauntless Grace with Spartan soul
Stands on the outer wall.
Regardless of the shower of balls
That fast around them fall.
The English come with marshalled strength
And nerved with deadly hate
They fiercely clash through friends and foes
And gain the foremost gate.

But right before them face to face
The clansmen of Mayo
Start up and greet those robbers well
With thrust and sabre blow.
And rushing fierce as mountain stream
Through dark and flooded glen
Leaps to the gate, the dauntless Grace
And all her fearless men.

Hurrah! Their spears are backward borne
Their blood-red flag is down
And Sydney vanquished and pursued
Spurs hard to Newport Town.
This lesson taught the Saxon churl
To dread a Free-man's blow
When the dauntless Grace O'Malley
Ruled a Queen in fair Mayo.

The walls of Carrick Clooney
Now lie crumbling and low
Its battlements dismantled are
All moss o'er every stone.
But the rebel youth in Westport
Feel their Irish hearts aglow
When they tell how Grace O'Malley
Fought and conquered in Mayo.

There's many a fearless rebel
In Westport and Clew Bay
Who watch with longing eagerness
For Freedom's dawning day.
There's many a brawny mountaineer
Prepared to strike a blow
For the old Green Flag and Freedom
On the soil of brave Mayo.

Oró, Sé do Bheatha 'bhaile

Pádraig Mac Phiarais

I
Sé do bheatha! a bhean ba leanmhar!
B'é ár gceach tú bheith i ngéibhinn,
Do dhuiche bhrea i seilbh meirleach
'S tú diolta leis na Gallaibh.

Chorus:

Oró! Sé do bheatha 'bhaile!
Oró! Sé do bheatha 'bhaile!
Oró! Sé do bheatha 'bhaile!
Anois ar theacht an tSamhraidh.

II

Tá Gráinne Mhaol ag teacht thar sáile,
Óglaigh armtha lei mar gharda;
Gaeil iad fein 's ní Gaill ná Spainnigh
'S cuirfid ruaig ar Ghallaibh.

III

A bhuí le Ri na bhfeart go bhfeiceam,
Muna mbeam beo 'na dhiaidh ach seachtain,
Gráinne Mhaol agus míle gaiscíoch
Ag fógairt fáin ar Ghallaibh.

Oró and Welcome Home

Pádraig Pearse (translated)

I
Welcome, O woman who was sorrowful
We were desolate while you were imprisoned.
Your lovely country in the hands of vandals
And you yourself — sold to the English.

Chorus:

Oró — and welcome home,
Oró — and welcome home,
Oró — and welcome home,
Would that the Summer is here.

II

Gráinne Mhaol is coming over the sea,
With a guard of young soldiers,
They are Irish, not English or Spanish
And they will rout the English.

III

Thanks be to God that I'm seeing
(Even If I only live for a week after!)
Gráinne Mhaol and a thousand warriors
Announcing ruin on the English.

Granuweal - An old song

I

A courtier call'd Dorset, from Parkgate did fail,
In his Majesty's yacht, for to court Granuweal;
With great entertainment the thought to prevail,
And rifle the charms of Granuweal.

Chorus:

Sing Budderoo, didderoo, Granuweal,
The Fox in the Trap we have caught by the tail
Sing success to the sons of brave Granuweal.

II

Says the courtier to Granu, if you will be true,
I will bring you to London, and do for you too;
Where you shall have pleasure that never will fail,
I'll laurel your Shamrock, sweet Granuweal.

III

Says Granu to Dorset, if that I would do,
Bring my fortune to London, my children would rue;
We would be like Highlanders eating of keal,
And cursing the union, says Granuweal.

IV

Says Granu, I always was true to my king;
When in war, I supply'd him with money and men.
Our love to King George with our blood we did seal,
At Dettingen battle, says Granuweal.

V

Says Granu, I always still lov'd to be free;
No foe shall invade me in my liberty.
While I've Limerick, Derry and the fort of Kinsale,
I'll love and not marry, says Granuweal.

VI

Says Granu, you see there's a large stone put in,
To the heart of the church, by the leave of the King.
The works of this stone shall be weigh'd in a scale,
With balance of justice, says Granuweal.

VII

I hope our brave Harrington, likewise Kildare,
Our trade and our commerce once more will repair,
Our lives we will venture with greatest affair,
Against French and Spaniards, says Granuweal.

VIII

Now, my dear boys, we've got shut of those bugs,
I charge you my children, lie close in your rugs,
They'll hide like a snake, but will bite I'll be bail,
I'll give them shillelagh, says Granuweal.

Poor Old Granuaile

Irish Street Ballads collected and annotated by Colm Ó Loughlainn, London 1928

My dream to some with joy will come and comes with grief to more,
As it did to me, my country, that dear old Erin's shore;
I dreamt I stood upon a hill beside a lovely vale,
And it's there I spied a comely maid and her name was Granuaile.

Her lovely hair hung down so fair and she was dressed in green,
I thought she was the fairest soul that e'er my eyes had seen;
As I drew near I then could hear by the pleasant morning gale,
As she went along she sang her song saying 'I'm poor old Granuaile'.

In O'Connell's time in '29 we had no braver men,
They struggled hard both day and night to gain our rights again;
Still, by coercion we were bound and our sons were sent to jail,
'You need not fret, we'll Home Rule get,' says poor old Granuaile.

I thought she had a splendid harp by her side she let it fall,
She played the tunes called Brian Boru, Garryowen, and Tara's Hall.
Then God Save Ireland was the next, and Our Martyrs Who Died in Jail,
'You need not fret, we'll have freedom yet,' says poor old Granuaile.

When I wakened from my slumber and excited by my fight,
I thought it was the clear daylight, and I found that it was night;
I looked all round and could see naught but the walls of a lonely jail.
And that was the last I ever saw of poor old Granuaile.

A New Song Called Granuaile

All through the north as I walked forth to view the shamrock plain
I stood a while where nature smiled amid the rocks and streams
On a matron mild I fixed my eyes beneath a fertile vale
As she sang her song it was on the wrongs of poor old Granuaile

Her head was bare and her grey hair over her eyes hung down
Her waist and neck, her hands and feet, with iron chains were bound
Her pensive strain and plaintive wail mingled with the evening gale
And the song she sung with mournful tongue was Poor Old Granuaile.

The gown she wore was stained with gore all by a ruffian band
Her lips so sweet the monarchs kissed are now grown pale and wan
The tears of grief fell from her eyes each tear as large as hail
None could express the deep distress of poor old Granuaile.

On her harp she leaned and thus exclaimed 'My royal Brian is gone
Who in his day did drive away the tyrants every one
On Clontarf's plains against the Danes his faction did prepare.
Brave Brian Boru cut their lines in two and freed old Granuaile.

'But now, alas, I must confess, avengers I have none
There's no brave Lord to wave his sword in my defence — not one
My enemies just when they please with blows they do assail
The flesh they tore clean off the bones of poor old Granuaile.

Six hundred years the briny tears have flowed down from my eyes
I curse the day that Henry made of me proud Albion's prize
From that day down with chains I'm bound no wonder I look pale
The blood they drained from every vein of poor old Granuaile.'

There was a lord came from the south he wore a laurel crown
Saying 'Grania dear, be of good cheer, no longer you'll be bound
I am the man they call great Dan, who never yet did fail
I have got the bill for to fulfil your wishes Granuaile.'

With blood besmeared and bathed in tears her harp she sweetly strung
And oh the change, her mournful air from one last chord she wrung
Her voice so clear fell on my ear, at length my strength did fail
I went away and thus did say, 'God help you, Granuaile'.