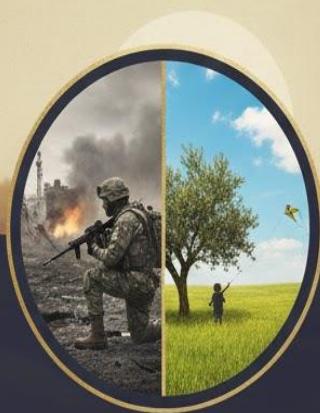




# A JUST WAR

BY VINCENT HOLMES



Published by  
Galway Academic Press



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## “a just war”

*a poem for our times*

piffle

bunk

poppycock

(Thanks Thesaurus.com)

baloney

garbage

drivel

gibberish

seafóid

hogwash

rot

tripe

balderdash

rubbish

absurdity.

Adjust war to peace.

## **“A Time for War”**

*-A poem for our times*

Yes, the Bible  
and its contributor  
got it wrong!  
There is no time for war.  
War serves nothing  
but misery and loss,  
only a Yahoo  
would think otherwise.  
“Stop Killing”  
Two words  
Of simple instruction  
Why not try them?

# My New Heroes

**Dedicated to my new heroes – the Warriors of A&E  
at UCHG February 2022**

I don't know how they do it,

the Warriors of A&E

daily, dealing with

The unruly,

The unmanageable,

The distressed,

The ungrateful,

The drunk,

The irascible,

and

The flawed

And yet they do

With dedication

professionalism

wit

humour

mirth  
patience  
kindness and  
unfathomable  
tolerance

To you;  
The Ronans  
The Annas  
The Emmets  
The Johns  
The Reeses  
The Davids  
The Lorraines  
The Kirsties  
The Maeves  
The man with the tea and sandwiches  
The cheerful lassies in CTI  
And all of you whose names  
I did not get  
From A&E entrance to exit  
My broken knee and I

will be eternally grateful

To you all!

Gura fada buan sibh uile

## **My Dolly from Dunmore**

She walks the Prom  
With such aplomb  
Her spinning  
Makes hearts soar  
Her smile so coy  
Fills me with joy  
My Dolly from Dunmore

Her gait is great  
Upright and straight  
An eye catcher  
For sure  
More craved than ore  
You'd just adore  
My Dolly from Dunmore

And in the gym  
In that skimpy thing  
Whistles shrill  
galore

Legs so long  
To prompt this song  
My Dolly from Dunmore

Her morning dips  
Cause heartbeat skips  
Her swimsuits  
Stir up lore  
T'would make you sing  
For her I'd swing  
My Dolly from Dunmore

Her unclad shoulder  
Makes passion smoulder  
Her laugh  
I'd love to store  
A glance my way  
Just makes my day  
My Dolly from Dunmore

Head held high  
She swims right by  
But then she comes

Ashore  
Her dripping skin  
Occasions sin  
My Dolly from Dunmore

Ochón Ochón  
Is móir an brón  
Nach Mormon mé  
A stór  
Mar céile a dó  
Liom go deo  
Mo Dolly as Dún Mór

## **Seven years married**

The late Autumn of 1984 heralded my tenth visit on the job to North Mayo. As is usual it was pouring rain as I turned into the drive of the guest house that is situated three miles from Belmullet. Anyone looking at me would have thought that I had fallen into the sea. I was drenched, soaked through, tired and hungry. My host, a widower, made every effort to give me a kind hearty welcome but his heart wasn't in it. It was just three months since his wife had died and he had lost his spirit on her passing. Loneliness pervaded every nook of the house. A kind of loneliness overcame me too as I thought of my own darling wife who had been left alone for days also due to the duties of my work. It occurred to me, not for the first time, that we would be seven years married this same week. My host's low ebb was very apparent in the stilted small talk we made, and with more than a modicum of self-

pity, I regretted, in hindsight, choosing his guest house as was my wont.

I asked, struggling for something to say, after conversing sombrely for a minute on his loss;

“Are there many visitor’s about?”

“Not many” he replied “ we have one lady visitor from France tonight.”

In that moment I got a blink of a glance of Josiane. In that instant she had crossed behind AJ, my host, heading from her bedroom to the bathroom at the end of the long corridor. AJ was telling me of the location of my own room but I heard nothing of his chat. Sweet God in heaven, no woman could be that beautiful. My breath caught in my throat – this was beauty beyond beauty, and she was every bit of it.

“I’ll turn on the electric under-blanket”, AJ said helpfully.

“Don’t “, I replied. “I’ll eat it later” – my soaring heart and fantasy already miles from his presence.

Who was she? What in the heck was she doing in a remote and isolated Belmullet? Where was her man? A little smile of pursuit appeared on my lips. The briefcase and bag we thrown on my bed and in that action work, loneliness, hunger, drenching and wife were suddenly forgotten. Whispering voices crept into my head “Seven years married.”

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France, French, how would I greet her? I knew five French sentences. Nay, I was only codding myself, I had five words of French. What would I do? What would I say? It didn’t matter a whit my pulse was racing. I threw off my soaking coat and decided I would shave, shave for the preparation! Preparation? Preparation for what? The razor slid smoothly across my cheek and I stared in the mirror. As sure as anything Robert Redford was staring back at me. Errant

wisps of hair were brushed across my pate and after a quick scouring under the armpits, a change of shirt, and a quick brush of the teeth, I was ready! After a final glance in the mirror and a tucking-in of my beer girth, tightly under my belt, out I went.

It was usual for AJ to have a flaming turf fire lit in the parlour. I stood momentarily outside its door, with half a French greeting forming on my lips. I opened the door by way of a grand entrance. There was no one inside.

I sat by the fire expectantly, staring into its flames, listening intently for any little noise that would announce her arrival. While I was in the middle of a dream, she glided in the door. Mon Dieu! A vision of pure loveliness. Her silk-like hair flowed caressingly down her back, her pert breasts danced freely under her light woolen top. Her kind brown eyes looked confidently and unflinchingly in my direction. Her cheeks were those of Aphrodite hewn from marble. Her lips were soft and

seductive and her face was that of the Virgin. A graceful loving smile shone from her. My pulse stopped, froze. Time stopped. Words failed me. “Bon soir” blurted out almost unknowingly as I was too smitten by her spell, her beauty and allure. With a huge effort, I tore my eyes away from her and stared into the fire for fear that she would think I was ogling her a temptation to which any man in his right mind would yield. “Allo” she responded quietly. The voice and music of an angel. My head was in turmoil. One half of my mind was trying to find a word, any word in French with which to communicate, the other half was floating stricken and afflicted by a yearning for love.

How do you say “Sit down” in French? How do you say “welcome”? How do you say “Oh my Juliet come hither into my arms?” And then, as happens an entire sentence of French that every pimply male teenager learns at school from an abler pupil popped into my head;

“Voulez vous coucher avec moi ce soir?” Crikey, It was on the tip of my tongue to say it but “Voulez vous sit down?” came out instead.

“Yourr Frrench iz likeh my Inglish not so gud, Oui?”. Oh my sweetness the accent alone would trigger a priapic outcome. In the heat and confusion of the moment I responded in Irish, the language of my upbringing.

“Gabh i leith isteach a ghrá!”

“Comment?” was her confused reply.

Both of us laughed at the melange of languages. Our keenness to communicate overcame our language difficulties, she spoke in broken English and I spoke in very broken French pulled from the grave of my schooling. Even with the language challenge we managed to get to know one another. She was a dancer, a danseuse contemporain, with the Theatre de Paradis in Paris and I was in paradise just conversing with her.

My conscience spoke to me again. “Desist! You’re seven years married, you’ve done nothing to bring solace to your host the chief purpose of your visit.” I decided to kill two birds with one stone. I would bring AJ out for a pint or two and invite Josiane too. AJ could act as chaperone. Haltingly I explained the proposal to her. A moment’s hesitancy flashed across her eyes but it quickly replaced by trust as she placed her confidence in us both as we headed out into the darkness of black, stormy, Belmullet night. The first step had been taken.

It did not help matter’s that my car was parked at the furthest corner of the small carpark. As luck would have it, the bulb was blown too in the yard light. AJ walked confidently ahead into the night his measured paces taking him towards my car with his spirits uplifted with the chance of a pint, company and a temporary respite from his lonely and sad abode.

“Merde, je ne vois rien du tout” she laughed, gingerly making her way, swallowed up in the darkness. In the pitch darkness nothing was visible to me either.

“Over ici” I encouraged, and taking a steer from my voice she walked straight into me. My nose buried itself in her hair. Her fragrance overwhelmed. A perfume of beguilement and seduction. My heart exploded. Draw her to you, smother her with kisses, it screamed. Had AJ not turned on the lights of the car to aid our progress, would step two have been taken in that moment?

We looked a right sight rushing in the door of Paddy Conroy’s pub from the howling gale. Every head turned in unison in our direction. Eight pairs of eyes looked at AJ and myself for a split second and then at the French lady for an eternity. You could read jealousy, desire, lust and eagerness clearly in those eyes. Mortal sins came two-a-penny and the sixth, ninth, and tenth commandments took a mental hammering too that night. Was I in my

element! The supreme show-off conversed in English with AJ the chaperone, French with Josiane and Irish with Paddy Mór. My French improved in direct proportion to the amount of pints consumed. She drank Harp, surely the drink of an angel. We spoke on every topic under the sun and when the conversation turned to family she remembered she wanted to call home in Paris. It suited my devious plan very much not to tell her that the large sign behind her back with guthán written on it was a public telephone nestling in a corner of the pub. I omitted to mention too that AJ had a telephone back at the guest-house. I am not one to miss an opportunity when it presents itself and I saw an opportunity coming in the telephone kiosk that was located in Church St – a short distance away. I concocted an excuse to go out in the storm to the kiosk having ensured first that we had the correct loose change for the public telephone. In went the two of us into the kiosk. I offered up a prayer in the hope that its door would jam even for a minute, but it didn't happen and alas

we managed to get the international operator on the line without any difficulty. In a twinkling, I found myself outside of the kiosk again, in the rain. It was a gentlemanly exit and withdrawal in order to afford her the opportunity of having a private conversation with home. Another opportunity to execute step two had slipped away.

We returned to the guesthouse shortly after midnight. AJ announced that he was off to bed and bade us a tipsy goodnight, crooning his way out of earshot. Josiane and myself continued our chat into the night back again in our cosy parlour. The howl of the gale outside and the patter of raindrops on the window added to our comfort. All we were missing was a bottle of wine. We were old friends now, two souls brought together by the serendipity of life. The dying embers of the fire attracted her and she kneeled down stoking the embers with the tongs. There was an uncertainty in her look as if some message was radiating to her from the embers. I stopped talking. The silence affected her

presently. She turned in my direction and all she said was “Quelle bonne fortune” and in single movement she put “step two” in train. She kissed me lightly on each cheek and without saying anything else she slipped out the door. It closed momentarily then it opened again, just her head appeared and she winked at me.

I felt as if I was wedged in my chair, I could not move a muscle. It was as if five hundredweight of cement were weighing me down. Did you ever see the likes? What was in the wink? French women, of course, were notorious for their bed antics. The answer came to me in a flash and I raced in the direction of my room. In one wild flurry in the dark, I threw off my clothes, except for my underpants and after a hasty brushing of my teeth I jumped between the sheets of the bed to wait.

A large crucifix adorned the wall overhead.

“Say a prayer and bolt the door” a voice ordered in my head. “Lead us not into temptation, lead us not

into temptation.” it urged. Seven years married. The eternal debate echoed through my head. I imagined her tip-toeing in my door, her nightdress slipping to the floor, her arms around my neck and her sweet French seductive whispers in my ears.

“Layoff” said the voice in my head. “ Be faithful to yourself, your faith, your wife”. “Don’t sin!”

The internal debate raged interminably.

“Go on, ya eejit, opportunity comes to to pause, not to stay.”

A heightened libido caused me to toss and turn ceaselessly. It was then I heard the light knocking on the door. Surely, it wasn’t happening! My mind screamed

“Entrez!”

My heart whispered,

“Stay out, go away!”

My body stiffened like a rod.

“No, this is not happening”, but the knocking came a second time. It had to be the branch of a tree hitting the window in the storm. Where are there trees on the North Mayo coast? I sat up in the bed and cupped the bedclothes up to my chin.

The reply stuck in my throat.

It was a loudly whispered timid and anxious “Oui?” “Good man, unplug the electric blanket” said the voice outside in a strong Mayo accent.

The following morning the note on the breakfast table read

“Chéri, tu es très très gentil. J’ai déjà un chagrin d’amour. Je n’ai besoin d’un autre. Josiane”

When I left the guesthouse, it was still pouring rain and my car’s front-right tyre was flat.

---

© 1984 **Vincent Holmes.** *Translated from Irish and first broadcast in Irish on Raidió na Gaeltachta’s Peann agus Pár.*

## Don't forget you're Irish

*(...a poem for St Patrick's day)*

With your mortgage through the ceiling  
In negativity equity  
With banking gone all pear shaped  
And ditto property  
Your stocks and shares have tumbled  
Your politicians a disgrace  
Your wife is drinking porter  
And you're in a desperate place  
Don't forget you're Irish  
And sing 'twill do, 'twill do.

When your neighbour  
Buys a telly, of quality HD  
And his daughter becomes a doctor  
With a mighty fine degree  
When jealousy n' begrudgingery  
Overcome you totally too  
Don't forget you're Irish  
And sing 'twill do, 'twill do.

When taxes they are climbing  
And your dole is cut in half  
And your best friend steals your Mrs  
And they run off for a laugh  
When you've lost your shirt  
On horses  
And your car's a zero-two  
Don't forget you're Irish  
And sing 'twill do, 'twill do.

When your teanga's undervalued  
And the kids say "Tá sé fear"  
And copious translations  
Continue much to jar  
When an Béarla usurps Gaeilge  
And cows only in English "moo"  
Don't forget you're Irish  
And sing 'twill do, 'twill do.

Saint Peter's on his day off  
And you're at the pearly gates  
And St. Patrick checks the records  
For your eternal fate

Don't forget He's Irish  
By a little more than half  
As he sneaks you in the back door  
Just give a little laugh  
And sing ye both in harmony  
Without much more ado

Don't forget you're Irish  
And sing 'twill do, 'twill do.

## A walk on the beach...

*The three dogs ran on ahead in their usual exuberant manner. Their tails continuously wagged as they sniffed the sea air and all else besides on a typical cold windy February day in Rusheen Bay. After our initial greeting Frank, my close friend of more than thirty years, and I walked the uneven ground in comfortable silence our minds focussed on our footsteps across the slippery seaweed-strewn terrain. I broke the silence “Frank, I have something to tell you...” The words came hesitatingly as I struggled to find the right mots. “I haven’t mentioned anything to herself yet...” Frank said nothing and waited patiently. He was used to my not getting to the point quickly. “I didn’t sleep well last night and I had to get up to a call of nature at 5.30am – a bowel movement. When I looked in the the toilet bowl, as you do, there was a good deal of blood in it too..”. Frank did not respond, he waited patiently to hear the full story, sensing that I was struggling to explain something difficult. “My*

*first thoughts were that it was the medication I'm on for the arthritis. It's said that anti-inflammatories and pain-killers are very hard on the lining of the stomach. They might have attacked it. You're meant to take them with food, sometimes I don't if the pain gets too bad. I hope it's not anything more sinister."*

*Frank, who does not mince words, stopped walking looked at me intently and said "That's one for the Doctor, make an appointment for today, now, or you'll be thinking about it all weekend." We walked on.*

I made the appointment for that Friday afternoon.

\*\*\*

The waiting room's radio blared a little loudly for my liking. Its purpose was to drown out any conversation between patient and doctor in the surgery next door. I resisted the temptation to turn

the volume down. Anyway, unusually, there was no one in the waiting room but myself. It was a 4.30pm appointment, but I expected to be waiting longer and that would give me time to prepare my introduction of a topic, to say the least, that I found embarrassing. An observer would have seen me squirming in the chair in rehearsal of what I was about to explain to the doctor. Just then he appeared in the doorway and said “Come on in!”. As I walked towards the surgery door he added “You’re walking a lot better since the last time I saw you” and that was my cue to divulge my ailment.

\*\*\*

*The crunch of tyres on gravel announced the arrival of Frank’s car at Rusheen Bay. His dog Tyson did his usual hop-down from the boot and headed straight for a large boulder on which to leave his mark and then greet his dog buddies. “Well, I’m still in the land of the living!” was my greeting to Frank. “It went well yesterday, kinda”. I knew that Frank*

*would be too polite to ask and that he would wait for me to tell the story in my own time.*

*“That Doctor will turn me into a monk yet. Every time I go, and there have been lots of visits recently, I’m deprived of something else. He’s very good though, very thorough. God it was a struggle trying to get the words out to explain it to him”*

*“Sure Doctor’s would be well used to that sort of thing” Frank replied anticipating the detail to come.*

*“Eh, says I to him, there was blood in my toilet bowl this morning after I performed and eh...mm..it appeared to be on the surface of my droppings, not in it, if you get my meaning...”*

*“We’ll have a look below” said the Doctor nonchalantly.*

“Pardon? What? You want to have a look at my bottom?” Even in the re-telling, the alarm was still in my voice.

“Hop up there on the surgery table and face the window. Slip off the pants first. It’ll just be a quick look”. This command was followed by the distinctive sound of surgical rubber gloves being snapped on.

*Frank laughed loudly.*

At this stage, lying on my side, my nose was firmly pressed against the cold surface of a surgery radiator.

“Bring your knees, up to your chin.”

*Frank’s guffaws echoed across Rusheen Bay.*

The surgery window and radiator lit up with the glare of light reflection. A glance over my shoulder confirmed that the doctor had a miner’s lamp

strapped to his forehead. A feeling of doom overcame me. It was a very odd sensation to have your buttocks separated, akin to making two halves of a peeled orange.

“Anal fissures. One to the front and other at the back”. The doctor spoke matter-of-factly.

“Anal what? Pardon?” The alarm in my voice reached a new crescendo.

“Anal fissures, it’s a tear in the skin near your back passage, usually occurs with a trauma or too large a stool”. The doctor volunteered the precise information.

“Oh” a measure of calm an relief came momentarily. It was very short lived. What felt like the narrow end of a baseball bat or starter handle for a vintage car was inserted very deeply into my rectum and rotated vigorously, first in a clockwise

direction then anti-clockwise. It felt like my Adam's apple was being pushed up my oesophagus.

*Frank looked like he was having a fit. He turned to a large boulder for support, with both hands pressed on its surface. His head was thrown back and the roars of laughter must have been heard in Seapoint two miles away. The three dogs stood still looking at him quizzically. Tyson, his own dog, wagged his tail animatedly sharing his Master's good form.*

"Just checking for polyps or a tumour " the doctor explained. " It seems all clear. You can slip the pants on again, I've something curious to show you."

What? What had he found in THAT place? The slow creep of alarm welled up again. But I was mistaken he simply reached for a book on his bookshelf and took down the latest edition of *MIMS* the pharmaceutical catalogue that

describes drugs, medical treatments and their properties.

“Look at this” he said. On page 17, his manicured finger nail pointed out a product called *Rectogesic – relief of pain associated with chronic anal fissure.*”

“Look what’s in it. It’s *Glycerin Trinitrate*. Look at the price of it, just an ointment”. He added.

“Gosh. That’s an explosive isn’t it?” I said feigning some knowledge of Chemistry.

“Yes, *Nitro Glycerin*, but not quite in the same quantities or application” he replied patiently.

A potential explosive on my bottom am I not through enough already, the thought flashed in my head.

“Look at the price of it! The trade price is €43.05 for 30 grammes of ointment! Wait’ ll you see this”.

He flicked the pages until he found page 65 in the Angina section of the catalogue.

“Look – *Nitrolingual Spray*. Look what’s in it. The same stuff *Glyceryl trinitrate*. Compare the price! I’m giving you a prescription for this. You wipe yourself first in the normal way. Use ordinary white tissue, the coloured variety have chemicals in them. Then wipe again with clean water and spray on this stuff, it relaxes the muscles in that area and can help healing too.”

I looked and compared. The trade price for a starter pack pump spray with 200 doses was €5.07.

*I suspect Frank saw what was coming. Tears were streaming down his face. “Stop, stop no more! I can’t take it.”*

As is usual with surgeries the chemist’s shop is not too far away. My relief was great after the consultation. I could look forward to a pleasant

weekend without a medical *Sword of Damocles* hanging over me. The shop had several customers huddled around the dispensing area. A lady attended to me and I parted with the prescription. “We’re a bit busy, take a seat and we’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

I sat down on a chair, mid-shop, some distance from the huddled group. A short while later I saw the chemist disengaging from the huddle and coming in my direction in a discreet, almost conspiratorial, manner.

“Have you used this product , *Nitrolingual*” before?” she asked in a whispered and sympathetic tone.

“ I haven’t “ I replied as a small uncontrollable smile started to spread across my face.

“ You spray it on the underside of your tongue as required”

*In the distance I could see Frank falling about like a drunk across the expanse of beach and Tyson ambling along by his side bemused at his Master's careering behaviour. Faint strains of hoots of continuous laughter assailed my ears.*

A walk on the beach...it was not.

# Gamins

*(To some active gamins in Knocknacarra)*

What did I do to you  
to cause you  
to take a newish moped  
of some 635 miles done  
from my front door  
and smash its front  
rip out its wiring and panels  
wantonly tear its seat  
and break  
its lights?

Nothing.

What did you gain  
and contribute to  
your community  
by stealing  
and destroying

and laughing  
aloud at your  
“heroics” and  
dubious know-how?

Nothing.

What does a future  
hold  
if your paths  
continue to follow  
a destructive  
abusive course  
against decent  
neighbours?

Nothing.

What's the contribution  
to your family reputation,  
avoidance of  
criminal record

that denies access  
abroad  
where you might  
broaden your minds?

Nothing.

My gift to you  
Is a silent fervent prayer  
That in your life  
It will never be said of you  
“He was worth....

Nothing”

