

**Erich Romberg**

**Mystical stories in and about Ireland**

**About the stories in the stories**

**Vol. 1**

## Dedication

### The Art

Storytelling is an intimate and interactive art. A storyteller tells from memory rather than reading from a book. A tale is not just the spoken equivalent of a literary short story. It has no set text, but is endlessly re-created in the telling. The listener is an essential part of the storytelling process. For stories to live, they need the hearts, minds and ears of listeners. Without the listener there is no story.



[www.storytellersofireland.org](http://www.storytellersofireland.org)

**Erich Romberg**

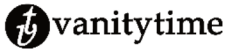
**Mystical stories in and about Ireland**

**About the stories in the stories**

**Vol. 1**

**Where the sky touches the land**

## Imprint



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## Table of contents

Foreword	7
Sleeping small town (poetry)	15
Altruistic Time Hexagram (Figures Poetry)	16
A look into the future	17
Where the sky touches the land	19
A look at the times	25
The Firebird	28
From the ashes (Poetry)	32
Time dilemma (Poetry)	33
The Nomad Girl and the Old Méabh	35
Saóirse and Méabh	35
Alone in the city	42
Story about Pádraig's fight with the devil	51
The girl who followed the call of her heart	64
The hole in the wall	75
The boy who sought his shadow	92
The peace-loving warrior and the elves of Coillte Maghach	101
The legend	115
Diamond Valley	132

Dream glider (poetry)	142
Time travel to Knockcroghery	143
The journey through time	145
The Storyteller of Tralee	153
When you have no more stories.	155
Epilogue	162

## Foreword

From 1993, the narrator lived in Kiltimagh, a small town in the west of Ireland, for about 10 years. This is also the period in which the stories in the planned book series are told. This book is the first in the series and is not a narrative about his life in Ireland, even though some episodes are set in real places but generally have a fictional content. You can see this period as a bridge between ancient and modern Ireland. Modern Ireland is not necessarily worse, in many ways even better than the old one. But above all it is different. He got to know Ireland during this transitional period. He had heard a lot about the old Ireland. This old Ireland, characterised by poverty, is more likely to be reflected in Heinrich Böll's 'Irish Diary' from 1957 - from a German perspective - or from an Irish perspective in 'Angela's Ashes' by the Irish-American author Frank McCourt from 1996. At the time, the country was already a member of the EU and on its way to becoming the economic miracle country of the 1990s. The term 'Celtic Tiger' was coined and the idea of unlimited growth developed in people's minds. The first setback came with the crash of the Telekom share price in 2001, when many people sold their houses, land and property, which they had been selling like sour beer for years at dumping prices. A previously unknown construction boom caused the value of their property to

explode and flushed money into the coffers of the formerly poor. Many sensed enormous potential returns in the purchase of telecoms shares. They sold their land for less than it was worth in order to cash in on their good fortune. Many fell back into the poverty from which they had come. Only now they no longer owned land. Families and friendships broke up. He had experienced this personally. So he is far from romanticising this country. With the global economic and financial crisis in 2008, the experience of finiteness finally returned. He was no longer living in Ireland at the time, but of course he visited his old hometown of Kiltimagh from time to time. The dream of prosperity is over for many.

He mixes reality and fiction in his stories. He is interested in traditional storytelling from ancient times in this remarkable country. The stories he writes down here were written during his time in Ireland, among other places. Originally, he had no intention of publishing them. It was the sheer joy of storytelling that led him to write them down. The idea came about at a storytelling festival in his home town of Kiltimagh, which took place once a year. The time of storytellers was actually over, television had long since taken over the function of entertainment and smartphones had yet to be invented. But once a year, this tradition was revived. The storytellers travelled from place to place to present their art and demonstrate their



skills. The storyteller regrets a little that he didn't get to experience the storytelling tradition. But he has heard a lot from Irish friends who grew up with this tradition. Especially on long winter evenings, people would meet in the pubs to listen to the storytellers, who could be found in almost every village. It was not unusual for the stories to go on for several evenings. Many could hardly wait for the next evening to listen to the continuation of a story from the previous evening by the crackling peat fire. The storytellers were the mediums of the past. The stories often began with "In my grandfather's day...". It was not uncommon for the stories to reach far back into the past and deal with events that had supposedly taken place generations ago. True and mysterious alternated. The true stories almost always had a secret. Nowhere else did he experience the belief in the supernatural as vividly as in Ireland. In conversations with friends, he often heard about ghostly apparitions that were told with such seriousness that it was hard to doubt the truth of the experiences. Even though he often suspected he was being taken for a ride when he heard less serious stories, he is now convinced that people in Ireland really aren't joking about such things. Perhaps this can be gauged from the fact that the inclusion of elfin areas was part of Irish road and building planning. People behaved in such a way as not to antagonise the elves. They were taken into

consideration in Ireland, and even if you wanted to build in Ireland as a non-Irish person, it was advisable to do so. Belief in the supernatural was deeply rooted in Ireland. So it was only natural that it was also reflected in the stories of the Irish. So when telling stories in or about Ireland, they should contain a more or less large portion of mysticism alongside the everyday. It is best to be infected by the magic of the stories told in Ireland. Not everything in life can be grasped with logic, just as events cannot always be clearly explained in retrospect with so-called "common sense". An Irish story is best when it has both the natural and the mystical. It is then up to the reader to decide which interpretation to allow. The storyteller himself is far more captivated by mystical interpretations of stories than by the banal reality that we have enough of in everyday life.

In his Irish days, there were still two pubs in his small town where this tradition of storytelling was cultivated - at least occasionally. The stories of the storyteller himself sometimes took place in these pubs. He particularly remembers Joyce's Bar, where flickering peat fires were a constant source of storytelling. The unforgettable old country lady Anne Joe has a firm place in the narrator's memory; she is the protagonist in the stories several times. When she died, he was still able to say goodbye to her. She died with her typical smile and the words:

"I'm going home now."

About three years ago, someone remembered Joyce's Bar something like this:

"JOYCE'S was our "fairy fortress", there was always magic in the air, from dusk till dawn, soul food ... long stories and fairy tales, my vision of heaven...". There is no better way to put it.

The stories begin with a poem about Kiltimagh. This is where he learnt storytelling. He tries to convey to the reader the atmosphere of sitting round a crackling peat fire with friends and someone telling one of those stories that Ireland has produced in such great numbers.

The first story in this volume takes place in one of his two favourite pubs, Lil's Bar, by a crackling peat fire. Where else? As the only guest at this time of day, the narrator is allowed to write a story at the regulars' table. The title story is born. It is about a strange encounter with an old man who expresses an equally strange wish. The attentive reader will not fail to notice that the narrator encounters himself.

By the time he has finished the story, the pub has filled up with guests and the regulars invite him to stay at the pub to tell the story he has written down. Afterwards, the men at the regulars' table discuss the story and quickly guess its meaning. As they liked the story, they ask the

storyteller if he can tell more stories. He tells the second story about a strange firebird that carries the entire consciousness of the world at the beginning of time.

The idea for the next story was born in Joyce's Bar, on one of the days of a storytelling festival, the narrator's first in this country. The story of Saóirse and Méabh also begins on a weekend during a storytelling competition. It tells the story of the nomad girl Saóirse, who has just turned sixteen. On the first day of the festival, she is allowed to gain unaccompanied experience in the small town of Kiltimagh for the first time. It is a time full of stories and Saóirse learns about love. Watching over all of this is the wise old Méabh, who advises the girl to listen only to her heart. This is not so easy and as a result she ends up making a difficult and painful decision

The narrator speaks from the perspective of Saóirse, who is equipped by Méabh in such a way that she is not recognised as a nomad girl.

In Ireland, the nomads are called Tinkers or Travellers, the travelling people. The nomads themselves prefer the term Traveller and call themselves Pavee. The Pavee are ethnically Irish themselves and have historically been excluded from the majority population through socio-economic processes. In the days before modern media, they played an important role in the dissemination of

news, stories and music. Irish folk can also largely be traced back to them. Without them, Irish culture would not be what it is today.

The Pavee lived in large family groups, mostly in wagon camps. Irish society was deeply prejudiced against this part of their people. The short episode in a shop from Saóirse's point of view at the beginning of the story was also experienced by the narrator, except that he was on the other side, in this shop.

Old Méabh is the big mum in her family and was also highly respected by the other Pavee families. She was an absolute role model, and not just for Saóirse. She is known as the 'old Méabh', whereby 'old' refers less to her years and more to her wisdom. Her authority is not based on strictness, but on her kind wisdom.

In the fourth story, an overtired driver is travelling west towards Galway along the sometimes narrow roads. As he is about to fall asleep, he leaves the road to rest. In the darkness, someone knocks on the rear window and asks for a lift in accent-free German. During the journey, he recognises a former best friend from his youth in the person who got on the train, and a journey back in time to a repressed past begins.

Finally, the fifth and last story is about a storyteller who has forgotten how to tell stories.

He spends a night in the former Joyce's and suddenly finds himself forced into the role of an executioner. As if by magic, he regains his storytelling ability. Let's wait and see how much mysticism and magic there really is.

## **Sleeping small town (poetry)**

Asleep you lie  
Small town,  
as in grey times.

Your heroes  
have never died,  
they have not been born  
for a long time.

The courage of your ancestors  
lies in their immutability.

Even the movements stand  
frozen in the streets.

The shock wave of time  
has rolled over you,  
the third millennium  
takes place elsewhere.

Only the time traveller  
sees the deep sleep recede,  
the swaying of the dream raft  
in the storm of thunderstorm of times.

## **Altruistic Time Hexagram (Figures Poetry)**

time  
to stay for a while  
but to leave the stage in time.  
Time is life, love, laughter and suffering.  
Flowing life, emerging, is passing away,  
passing and fading until the end of time.  
eternal reborn, sunlight flooded through,  
the infinity laughs about the lust for life.  
Live, love, laugh and suffer  
to linger in  
time.



## **A look into the future**

It was a rainy Sunday morning and I was sitting in Lil's Bar. Apart from Vera, Tom and me, there was no one else here. Vera looked to be in her mid-seventies, her brother maybe a year older, I had never asked her. As if I'd had a premonition, I had my writing utensils with me. I ordered a pint of Guinness and told Vera that I wanted to write a story. Stories characterise this country and the people here love to hear and tell stories. They laugh at the funny ones, get serious about the thoughtful ones and get creeped out by the scary ones. Storytelling is a serious matter that is fun. So it was only logical that Vera started the ceremony straight away and lit a peat fire in the fireplace. Indeed, the flickering and crackling fire created an atmosphere that stimulated my writing. I was allowed to take the seat by the fire, which was actually reserved for special guests and remained empty in their absence. So it was an honour to be allowed to sit here. There was only one condition: The regulars would arrive in about two hours, then I would have to take another table. Tom was actually one of them, but he preferred to sit at or behind the bar when the others weren't there. He just nodded in agreement when Vera put the beer on the sacred table. So my story couldn't be too long, because I expected to have to tell it. As I was writing it in German, I made a few notes in English in the margin. In addition to a German-English dictionary, I

always had an English-Irish dictionary with me because I used Irish terms from time to time - smartphones didn't exist back then. I didn't realise then that the Irish dictionary would become so important for this story.

I never knew what I would write when I sat down. So I started with a walk from Cultrasna, the neighbourhood I lived in at the time, down the often-travelled path to the River Gloré, with my dog of course. For something to happen, I had to meet someone. As the story progressed, I realised that I had to find a suitable name for my encounter from the dictionary.

## **Where the sky touches the land**

The night is clear and cold. Silence has fallen over the land, broken only by Leo's familiar panting. He seeks me out and sometimes I can feel his body against my leg. The stars of the universe fulfil a very private task today; I know that they are only shining up there for Leo and me. Houses and huts are scattered around, painted into the landscape by an aesthetic god. With my gaze still fixed on the light of infinity, my steps carry me onwards. At night, the path down to the Glore River makes me realise and forget a thousand things; that's why I love these late walks.

Suddenly there is an old, shrivelled little man.  
Encounters at such a late hour are rare here.

"I was expecting you, how are you? " he speaks to me.  
A strange greeting; I don't know him.

"Not bad," I reply, surprised, and try to remember, in case there's anything to remember.

"It's already late, the river down there is waiting for us," he continues.

"The Glore?" I ask unnecessarily. The little man pauses for a while, then says:

"Yes, yes, my river, our river."

I caught myself and say that I don't remember him.

"I am who I am - Támé tú Féin."

Strange words and a strange name, I know I've never heard it before. I ask him where he lives.

"Where the sky touches the land," the old man says more to himself than to me.

He seems to love being vague and points his bony finger at Leo:

"That's a nice dog."

As if Leo had understood him, he cuddles up to him. He seems to like the old man, because this trusting behaviour towards strangers is unusual for him. The old man pats his head. We talk about my dog, about the weather in this neighbourhood and about this beautiful night. Then the old man's eyes flash at me with a fire that seems to surpass even the glow of the stars.

"We meet because we have overcome the time between us for a little while," he says mysteriously, "we have to use it by doing me a little favour that will also benefit you."

This mysterious puzzle game is starting to appeal to me, or is it not a game at all? I ask cautiously whether I would be able to.