

Harry Clarke was born in Dublin in 1889. He worked from an early age in his father's design studio, and later studied at night at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art. In 1914, Clarke won a scholarship that enabled him to study medieval glass in England and Paris; he visited Chartres Cathedral and aspired to its greatness. The following year he was commissioned to create the windows for the Honan Chapel in Cork, this work established his reputation and many other commissions, both religious and secular followed. There were a number of elements which set Clarke apart as a stained glass artist: his use of rich colours was unique, he mixed bright greens and rich reds with blues, purples and pinks to create sparkling contrasts. His absolute attention to detail; he was known to fire a single piece of glass over and over again until he got the colour and quality just right. His skill as a draughtsman also set his stained glass apart, his beautifully-modelled, elongated figures in elaborately decorated settings were unusually detailed and expressive in such a precise and technical craft.

*An Túr Gloine - The Tower of Glass*, was a studio set up in Dublin by artist Sarah Purser and Edward Martyn, one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre. It followed the same idealistic principles as the British Arts and Crafts Movement. A. E. Child managed it and he employed such talents as Evie Hone, Wilhelmina Geddes and Michael Healy. Under the instruction of Child, Harry Clarke's talent flourished. The revival in medieval-style stained glass reached its fullest expression at this time. In 1910, he won the gold medal in the Board of Education National Competition for Stained Glass for his piece *The Consecration of St. Mel, Bishop of Longford*, which now hangs in the Crawford Art Gallery. He was to win this gold medal three times.

The Symbolist movement developed in French literature as a response to disillusion following the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune of 1870, it was also a reaction against scientific rationalism and the progressive materialism of society. The movement also captured a flavour of the end of the century decadence. An emphasis on the imagination and the subconscious was foremost, the works of Baudelaire, in particular his *Fleurs du Mal*, where he promoted the idea that art could give rise to altered states of mind and separate realities was seminal. In England, the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti with his recurrent theme of waif-like *femme fatale* echoed the other-worldliness of the symbolist movement. Undercutting this movement was a stifled eroticism and fantasy that is evident in much of the work of the Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau movements. Clarke's work in illustration owes a great deal to his admiration of these styles.

In 1916, Clarke's illustration of Hans Christian Andersen's *Fairy Tales* was hailed as a masterpiece. Clarke was already working on *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* by Edgar Allan Poe. Four originals that display the beauty and eloquence, as well as the grotesque and disturbing qualities of these illustrations can be seen at the Crawford. The pen and ink drawing *Ligeia* shows his lyrical use of line and pattern to produce a dark and menacing atmosphere within the grouping of the figures. White lines from the black background pick out the figures. In a similar fashion to his stained glass work they are scrawny and elongated, elaborately draped and languidly posed. *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* made his reputation as an illustrator and he went on to illustrate five more major books including Goethe's *Faust* and *Selected Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*. Perhaps it was the awareness of his own impending death that attracted him to such gothic imagery, and drove him to work at such a rate. He died in 1931 of Tuberculosis, at the age of 42.