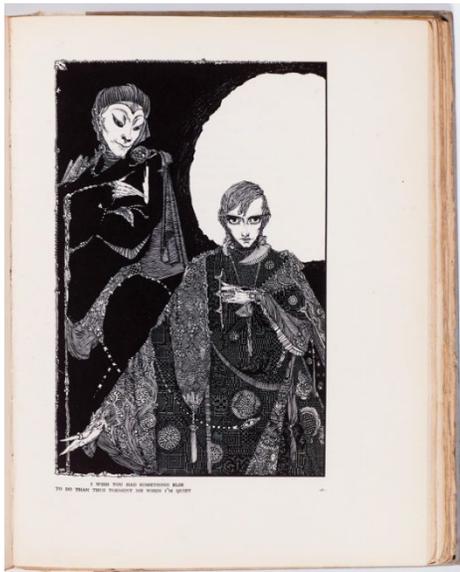


## HARRY CLARKE AND THE GENEVA WINDOW

Opened November 1, 2023

In 1926, just five years after winning independence from the United Kingdom, the government of the Irish Free State commissioned world-renowned artist Harry Clarke to create a stained-glass window for the International Labor Office in Geneva, Switzerland. For its content, Clarke focused on works of the Irish Literary Revival, a movement associated with Irish nationalism and a broader renewed interest in the country's ancient past as a basis for an independent national identity.

Intended as Ireland's gift to the League of Nations and a vehicle to showcase a new, modern nation, the completed stained glass, known as the *Geneva Window*, was condemned by the country's conservative government as too provocative. Clarke, unwilling to make changes and in rapidly failing health, died shortly before its official rejection. His jewellike masterpiece endures, a testament to the exquisite and idiosyncratic complexity of Clarke's work and an entry point into understanding the cultural and political forces that shaped his world.



Book, *Faust*, 1925

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931), illustrator

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (German, 1749–1832), author

George G. Harrap & Co, London, publisher

Walter Lewis, University Press, Cambridge, printer

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, 83.2.56

Clarke excelled at drawing, applying his skills to book illustration as well as to stained glass. His work in both mediums was celebrated for its intricacy and detail, used for dramatic and sometimes macabre effects.

Here Clarke rendered himself in an eerie self-portrait as the tormented Faust with Mephistopheles (the agent of the devil) looming over his shoulder.



**Wall cabinet, c. 1899**

Joseph Malachy Kavanagh (Irish, 1856–1918)

Dublin

Mahogany, copper

The Wolfsonian—FIU, Gift of John Alexander Ltd., 2005.9.1

The Celtic Revival was the leading design aesthetic in Ireland during Clarke's life. With imagery inspired by ancient texts and centuries-old objects, the decorative arts often incorporated intricately interlacing mythological animal forms, as in this copper relief dragon.



**Inkstand and box, c. 1884**

Thomas K. Austin & Sons, Dublin

Yew wood, brass, glass, velvet

The Wolfsonian—FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, TD1993.77.1–3

Celtic symbols—spirals, intricate knots, and animal forms—adorn the hardware of this wedding gift for the daughter of a wealthy British politician and member of Parliament for County Galway. Its maker specialized in “fancy cabinet goods.”



**Painting, *Spirit of the Woods*, c. 1905**

Æ (pseudonym for George Russell; Irish, 1867–1935)

Dublin

Oil on canvas

The Wolfsonian—FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XX1990.71

In this painting by prolific writer and painter Æ, a fairy holding a blue mushroom glows between two trees in a darkened forest. In addition to figuring prominently in the Irish Literary Revival, Æ was also a lifelong mystic, reporting visions that included nature spirits or *aos sí*, the fairies of Irish folklore. These otherworldly creatures were believed to be descended from the earliest inhabitants of Ireland and considered capable of mischief if angered.

Æ's 1902 play *Deirdre* is represented in the sixth panel of the *Geneva Window*.



**Belt, 1909**

Hopkins & Hopkins, Dublin, maker

Sterling silver, copper

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WC2001.6.11.4

This elaborate belt features a clasp designed after the *Ardagh Chalice*, a medieval treasure found in 1868, and links inspired by the *Book of Kells*. Wearing Celtic Revival jewelry took on special significance for Irish nationalists in the fight for independence from British rule.



**Brooch, c. 1890**

Sterling silver, agate

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WC2004.6.43.1a,b



**Clasp, *Tara Belt Clasp*, 1900**

Hopkins & Hopkins, Dublin, maker

Sterling silver

The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Private Collection, T2021.1017.2

Archeological finds, such as the 8th-century *Tara Brooch* discovered in 1850, became objects of inspiration. Almost immediately, copies were being made by Waterhouse, a Dublin jeweler who displayed replicas at the 1851 London Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. This filigreed brooch by an unknown maker mirrors the shape of the medieval pin, while Dublin silversmiths Hopkins & Hopkins duplicated its form to create this belt clasp.

## EARLY YEARS

Born on St. Patrick's Day, Clarke grew up in the family's Dublin church-decorating business—the home and studio shared the same building. From an early age he was surrounded by religious iconography and stained glass and, according to his son Michael, a Jesuit education filled Clarke's young mind with vivid impressions of heaven and hell. His life changed at age 14 when his mother, his closest confidant, died. Clarke left school soon thereafter to work for his father, apprenticing in stained glass during the day and studying at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art at night. His great talent was quickly recognized, winning him scholarships and awards followed by important commissions in stained glass and book illustration.

Clarke was drawn to a fantastical merging of Symbolism, the Celtic Revival, fairytales, and more. He reveled in creating tension through duality, frequently juxtaposing luminosity with darkness, beauty with the grotesque, the hallowed with the profane. His sources were diverse—Irish literature and theater and the dramatic sets and costumes of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes greatly informed his work, and he gathered visual references through sketches and photography. Clarke was also drawn to fun and whimsy and became an avid fan of the cinema, especially Charlie Chaplin.

GRAPHIC PANEL



### Photograph of Harry Clarke

Described as reserved and rather sensitive as a child, Harry Clarke was deeply affected by the loss of his mother. Like her, he was often ill.

Lafayette, Dublin, photographer



### Harry Clarke at art school, c. 1911

Seated second from left, Clarke is participating in a life drawing class at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art.

Courtesy Fiana Griffin



**Harry Clarke with family and friends, c. 1915**

In this garden snapshot, Clarke is standing at left, next to this brother Walter. Seated in folding lawn chairs are his future wife Margaret Crilley, his sisters, Dolly and Kathleen, and fellow art student Ethel Rhind.

Courtesy Fiana Griffin



**Harry Clarke Studio**

Clarke spent much of his life at 33 North Frederick Street, location of the family home and business. After his father died in 1921, he moved the Harry Clarke Studio to numbers 6 and 7, pictured here.

Courtesy Fiana Griffin



Drawing, **Portrait of Margaret Clarke, c. 1915**

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931)

Dublin

Graphite and charcoal on paper

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WC2007.10.7.1

Clarke met his future wife and fellow artist, Margaret Crilley, when attending the Dublin Metropolitan Museum of Art. They married in 1914 and had three children: Michael, David, and Ann.

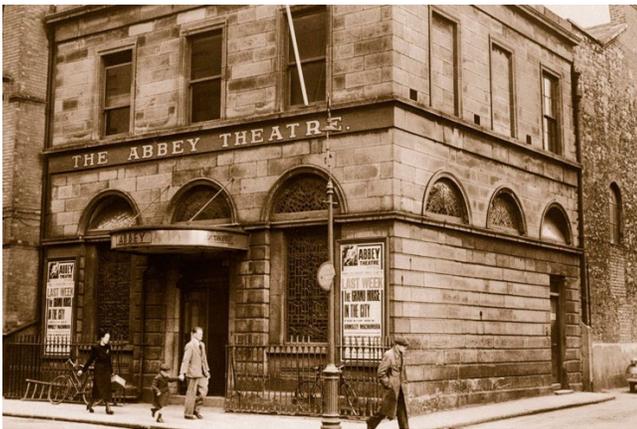
Margaret, too, was a great talent, considered one of Ireland's leading portrait painters.

## CLARKE'S DUBLIN

Clarke's short life bridged a period of conflict and turbulence as Ireland sought independence from the United Kingdom. Nationalism dominated Irish consciousness at this time and the Celtic Revival movement, the Irish Literary Revival, and the Gaelic League all advocated for the revitalization of Irish language and culture. Another strong influence was the Abbey Theatre, Ireland's first national theatre and a nexus for Irish writers, many of whom Clarke knew and included in the *Geneva Window*.

Clarke was also personally affected by the Easter Rising of 1916, a week-long revolt against British rule that left Dublin in shambles. His printing blocks and illustrations for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* were destroyed in a fire and the book was never published. Clarke later memorialized the Easter Rising in the *Geneva Window* with a poem by Padraig Pearse written the night before the British executed him for his part in the insurgency.

### GRAPHIC PANEL



#### The Abbey Theatre

The theatre was founded in 1904 by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory, both featured in the *Geneva Window*. Without exception, all of the writers included in the window had some kind of connection or affiliation to the theater—Clarke even acted in several Abbey productions while attending art school.



#### Postcard of the Irish Rebellion, May 1916

Almost 500 people died and 2,600 were wounded in the 1916 Easter Rising that left parts of central Dublin in ruins. The center of the fighting was very close to Clarke's home and studio.

Eason and Sons, Dublin, publisher

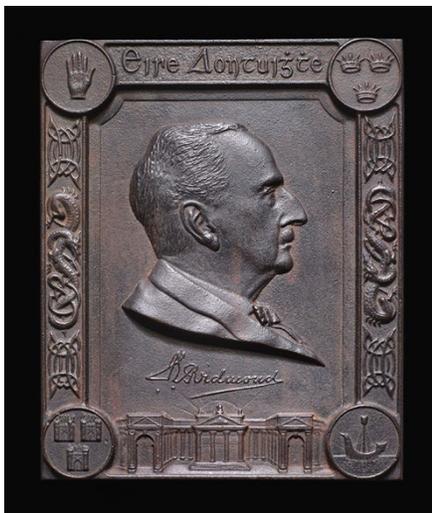


### Casket, 1876

John R. Ryan & Co., Dublin

Bog oak, gold-plated brass, malachite, quartz, amethyst, onyx  
The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of  
Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WC2003.1.3.1

Iconography from the Celtic Revival was widely used in politically charged objects such as this casket presented in 1876 to prominent Irish nationalist leader Isaac Butt by the Dublin City Council. It was designed to contain the Freedom of the City of Dublin, an illuminated scroll presented to individuals contributing to the life of the city, or of Ireland in general. Its first recipient, Butt had established what would become known as Home Rule, the dominant movement advocating for Irish self-government. The relief-carved chest, modelled after an ancient Irish shrine, features onyx representations of other early Irish nationalist leaders, Daniel O'Connell and Henry Grattan.



### Plaque, *Éire Aontuigte [Ireland United]*, 1914

Michael Lawlor (Irish, 1840–1920), sculptor

Booth and Brookes, Burnham-on-Crouch, Great Britain,  
manufacturer

United Irish League of Great Britain, London, commissioner  
Iron

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of  
Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WX2016.266

Irish nationalist and Parliament member John Edward Redmond is depicted in this commemorative plaque. Celtic knots and interlacing mythological creatures frame his profile, with the coats of arms for the four provinces of Ireland in the corners. The Irish Parliament building can be seen at the bottom.

The plaque commemorated Redmond's role in the 1914 passage of Home Rule legislation. The law never went into effect, and instead the Irish War of Independence (1919–22) led to the establishment of the Irish Free State, a dominion of the British Empire that later evolved into the present Republic of Ireland.



Illuminated address, *Connradh na Gaedilge [The Gaelic League]*, 1906

Seághan Maicsbhell (also known as Seán Maxwell; Irish, d. 1948), illustrator

John Milligan, (Irish, 1854–1938), frame carver

Connradh na Gaedilge, Dublin, commissioner

Ink, paint, and paper in oak frame

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of

Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift, WC2004.6.18.1

Interlacing mythological creatures punctuated by vignetted scenes frame this illuminated address presented to Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League and later the first president of Ireland. It commemorated Hyde's seven-month-long fundraising trip to the United States that included an invitation from President Theodore Roosevelt to visit the White House. Hyde raised £10,000 and was widely celebrated upon his return.

In response to the ongoing English political and cultural dominance in Ireland, the Gaelic League was founded in 1883 to promote Irish language and culture. It became a galvanizing force for Irish nationalism and a breeding ground for revolutionaries seeking independence from the United Kingdom.

## THE COMMISSION

Shortly after Clarke received his commission for the *Geneva Window* in 1926, he stated that he wanted to create something modern that gave “opportunities for phantasy.” With the assistance of Nobel Laureate William Butler Yeats, Clarke selected fifteen of Ireland’s greatest modern writers, synthesizing literature and art for a uniquely Irish creation. For each author, he conceived a complex vignette, weaving together diverse themes that included nationalism, religion, spirituality, desire, sex, and mortality.

The process was slow. At the time, Clarke was overwhelmed with multiple commissions and in rapidly declining health. In 1929, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. His doctors sent him to a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland, interrupting work on the window for more than a year.

### GRAPHIC PANEL



#### **The International Labor Office (ILO), Geneva, Switzerland, c. 1930**

The ILO building in Geneva, completed in 1926, was designed by Swiss architect Georges Epitoux. Multiple countries belonging to the League of Nations gifted works of art for the building.

Image courtesy ILO Archive



#### **International Labor Building interior, Geneva, Switzerland, c. 1925**

Epitoux originally envisioned the space at the top of this staircase for Clarke’s installation, but the site went instead to German expressionist painter Max Pechstein. In addition to Epitoux’s insistence that these windows, unlike those designed by Clarke, allow for maximum light, this more substantial location would have required a budget larger than the Irish government was willing to allocate.

Image courtesy ILO Archive



#### **Max Pechstein’s stained-glass window**

Pechstein’s window celebrated the theme of labor and was produced by the Berlin stained-glass firm Puhl, Wagner, and Heinersdorff.

Image courtesy ILO Archive



**International Labor Building interior, Geneva, Switzerland, c. 1926**  
The window at the top of the staircase, adjacent to the office of the deputy director, was the approved location for Clarke's commission.

Collection and Image ©Hugh Lane Gallery



### Harry Clarke's letterhead

Clarke wrote to Edward J. Phelan, chief of the Diplomatic Section of the International Labor Office, on his company's letterhead to organize a Geneva visit to discuss the window.

Image courtesy ILO Archive

## THE REJECTION

Clarke returned to Ireland in May 1930 to complete the window. In September, it was temporarily installed in a government building for review. Almost immediately, the President of Ireland's Executive Council, W. T. Cosgrave, had misgivings, citing concerns over the depiction of a semi-nude woman dancing before a repulsive Mr. Gilhooley—a scene drawn from a work by newly banned writer Liam O'Flaherty. Wider disapproval of the window grew as Ireland's conservative political and religious leaders condemned its portrayal of decadent sensuality, sexual innuendo, and drunkenness. In overwhelmingly Catholic Ireland, the fact that seven of the fifteen writers were Protestant added concern. This was not the vision of Ireland the government wished to promote.

Cosgrave wrote to Clarke that "the inclusion of scenes from certain authors as representative of Irish literature and culture would give grave offense to many of our people." Unwilling to compromise and in failing health, Clarke returned in October to Switzerland, where he died three months later at the age of 41. Shortly thereafter, Clarke's widow received payment for the window but also learned that it was not going to Geneva for installation.



Booklet, *Origin of John Jameson Whiskey Containing Some Interesting Observations Thereon Together with the Causes of its Present Scarcity*, 1924

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931), illustrator

John Jameson & Son, Ltd, Dublin, publisher

Maunsel & Roberts, Dublin, printer

The Wolfsonian—FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XC1994.3004

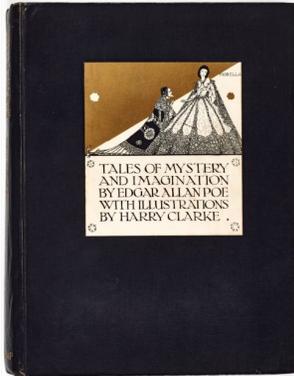


Bookplate, *R. M. Butler's Book*, 1923

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931), illustrator

The Wolfsonian—FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XC2019.07.3

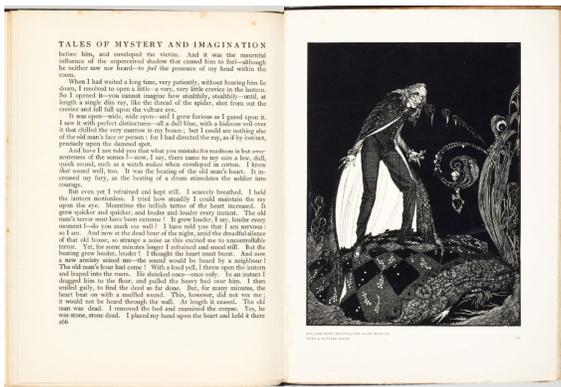
Book cover and page spread



Book cover, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 1923  
(Originally published, 1919)

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931), illustrator  
Edgar Allan Poe (American, 1809–1849), author  
George G. Harrap & Company Limited, New York City,  
publisher

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection,  
83.2.60



Book page spread, “*Forest and Cavern*,” from *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, 1933 (originally published, 1919)

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931), illustrator  
Edgar Allan Poe (American, 1809–1849), author  
Tudor Publishing Co., New York City

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection,  
83.2.59

Clarke’s exquisite line work and predilection for the fantastic and the terrible is seen in his interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories, first published in 1919 and expanded in 1923. Many agreed that Clarke was perfectly suited to render Poe’s disturbing tales. In a 1920 review describing the book as “an amazing display of horror and virtuosity,” *The English Review* went on to state that Clarke’s “imaginative genius... has found its ideal subject. He has succeeded as perhaps no other living artist could have done.”

## CLARKE'S PROCESS

Driven to transfer his detailed drawings to glass, Clarke pushed the stained-glass medium to new limits. Schooled in the Arts and Crafts philosophy, he was committed to direct participation in all phases of the creative process. He first created ink drawings followed by watercolor renderings for each panel.

The process of transferring his drawings to glass required multiple steps. Clarke worked almost exclusively with "flashed" glass. This is glass that is layered—one side is clear while the other is pigmented. He would dip the glass into hot wax, creating a resist, and then draw into the wax, exposing the colored glass beneath. The wax-covered glass was then immersed in a bath of hydrofluoric acid. Any area where the wax had been removed was etched, creating lighter tones. Exposure to this extremely dangerous material likely contributed to Clarke's illness, as he was known to painstakingly repeat this process as many as six times for each image until he was satisfied. He then reintroduced color with silver stain and vitreous paint. Final intricate detailing was achieved with a pen or excised with a needle. To add depth and further expand his color palette, each panel was double-plated.

[digital presentation on TV screen]



### Watercolor to Glass

This digital presentation features nine of Clarke's preparatory watercolor drawings, each in relation to its corresponding panel in the *Geneva Window*. These drawings, likely created in 1927, demonstrate an important aspect of Clarke's practice—meticulous planning and attention to detail. In order of appearance, *Juno and the Paycock*, *The Magic Glasses*, *A Cradle Song*, *The Weaver's Grave*, *The Dreamer*, *The Playboy of the Western World*, *The Others*, *The Demi Gods*, and *Our Music*.

Collection & images ©Hugh Lane Gallery



Stained-glass panel, *Mütter Helvetia* [Mother Helvetia], 1926

Max Pechstein (German, 1881–1955), designer  
Puhl, Wagner, and Heinersdorff, Berlin, maker  
Glass, lead, wood

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection of  
Decorative and Propaganda Arts, Promised Gift,  
WC2004.2.29.1

Clarke's painstaking process for completing the *Geneva Window* stands out when viewed in light of other stained-glass production of the era. In this case, a Berlin studio fabricated the panel based on Max Pechstein's design, just as it did for his windows in the International Labor Office.

Here Helvetia, the allegorical personification of Switzerland, is depicted Madonna-like, holding a child in her arms. The panel was a gift to the Swiss government from German President Paul von Hindenburg in gratitude for humanitarian aid in the years following the First World War.

## POSTSCRIPT

Seven years after its rejection, writer A. Kelly commented in *The Irish Press*, “This was the last piece of work Harry Clarke ever did before illness took him away forever. In it he is at his most imaginative and the glory of color, which was his chief gift, is a strange blend of dark beauty and almost spectral luminosity.”

Margaret Clarke despaired over the rejection of her husband’s final work and bought it back from the government in 1933 for the amount originally paid—£450. For years it stayed in a frame in the Clarke studio, except for an eleven-year period when it was on view at the Hugh Lane Gallery, a municipal museum in Dublin. In 1982, the Clarks’ sons loaned the window to Mitchell “Micky” Wolfson, Jr., for *Style of Empire*, an exhibition in Miami for a new institution that would evolve into The Wolfsonian–FIU. After a brief return to Europe in 1988 for display at London’s Fine Art Society, the window was acquired by Wolfson for his nascent museum. This masterpiece now resides in Miami Beach as a highlight of the Wolfsonian collection and a tribute to Harry Clarke’s genius.

“The loveliest thing ever made by an Irishman.”

—Thomas Bodkin (Director of the National Gallery of Ireland, 1927–35)



**Stained glass window**, commissioned 1926, completed 1930  
(never installed)

For the International Labor Building, League of Nations,  
Geneva

Harry Clarke (Irish, 1889–1931)

Clarke Studios, Dublin, maker

Stained glass, lead comes

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection,  
TD1988.34.1