**The Croppy Boy Lyrics and Background**

By

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"The Croppy Boy" is a tragic old [Irish](https://www.liveabout.com/irish-music-basics-3552968) folksong that was written by an Irish poet named William B. McBurney, who used the pseudonym Carroll Malone, in 1845. The song, a memorial of the [Uprising of 1798](https://www.thoughtco.com/irish-rebellions-of-the-1800s-1774018), tells the story of a young man (a "croppy," as the young 1798 uprisers were called, due to their short-cropped hair) who, on his way to battle, stops in at a church to [make a confession](https://www.learnreligions.com/the-sacrament-of-confession-542139). He tells his story to the shrouded priest who is sitting in a chair. After he's confessed his sins (and outed himself as a Rebel), the "priest" reveals himself to be an English soldier and arrests the young man and takes him away to be executed as a traitor. A quick language point: "buachaill" is Irish for "boy" or "lad."

**Music**

"The Croppy Boy" is set to an old Irish air called "Cailin Og a Stor," which is at least 500 years old. This air also provides the music for the folksong "Lady Franklin's Lament" (also known as "Lord Franklin" or "Sailor's Dream"), upon which [Bob Dylan](https://www.liveabout.com/bob-dylan-joan-baez-folk-royalty-1322445) based his song "Bob Dylan's Dream."

**Lyrics**

Good men and true in this house who dwell  
To a stranger buachaill I pray you tell  
Is the Priest at home or may he be seen  
I would speak a word with Father Green.

The youth has entered an empty hall  
Where a lonely sound has his light footfall  
And the gloomy chamber's cold and bare  
With a vested Priest in a lonely chair.

The youth has knelt to tell his sins  
"Nomine Dei," the youth begins  
At "mea culpa," he beats his breast  
Then in broken murmurs he speaks the rest.

"At the siege of Ross did my father fall  
And at Gorey my loving brothers all  
I alone am left to my name and race  
I will go to Wexford to take their place."

"I cursed three times since last Easter day  
And at Mass-time once I went to play  
I passed the churchyard one day in haste  
And forgot to pray for my Mother's rest."

"I bear no hate against living thing  
But I love my country above my King  
Now Father, bless me and let me go  
To die, if God has ordained it so."

The Priest said naught, but a rustling noise  
Made the youth look up in a wild surprise  
The robes were off, and in scarlet there  
Sat a yeoman captain with fiery glare

With fiery glare and with fury hoarse  
Instead of a blessing he breathed a curse  
'Twas a good thought, boy, to come here and shrive  
For one short hour is your time to live.

Upon yon river three tenders float  
The Priest's on one, if he isn't shot  
We hold this house for our Lord and King  
And amen, I say, may all traitors swing.

At Geneva Barracks that young man died  
And at Passage they have his body laid  
Good people who live in peace and joy  
Breathe a prayer, shed a tear for the Croppy Boy.

**James Joyce's "Ulysses" and Bloom's Utopian Vision of Ireland**

By [Kelley S. Kent](http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/authors/1251/kelley-s-kent)  
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Simon Dedalus' singing of "The Croppy Boy" in the Ormond Hotel bar acts as a siren song for Bloom. "The Croppy Boy" commemorates the 1798 rebellion in the death of a young man, betrayed by an English captain posing as a Catholic priest. In The Odyssey, the Sirens' song was an attempt to bewitch Odysseus and his men with promises of pleasure, as they crashed on the rocky shores (Gifford 290). Why, however, is this nationalist ditty a "siren song"? It is Dedalus' and the other Dubliners' unconscious attempt to persuade Bloom to view violence as one reliable means of combating English oppression. Bloom, however, is a pacifist, a man who does not condone or participate in violence. He is ultimately not convinced.

There are other reasons for considering "The Croppy Boy" a siren song. Bloom's forging of alliances with some of the political leaders of Dublin does not help his asexual relationship with his wife Molly, herself basically apolitical. Bloom's decision to listen to Dedalus' rendition--"But wait"--is also an attempt to block from his mind the forthcoming adultery (U 11.1005). After Dedalus has finished singing, Bloom finally decides to leave, but he does not go home. His final word on the bloody history of Ireland, or at least Robert Emmet's version of it, is a release of gas.

Like a good pacifist, Bloom has never served in the military, but his latent desires for military recognition surface in "Circe," although temporarily on the wrong side. Responding to an anonymous voice that supports England, Bloom says he is "as staunch a Britisher as you are, sir. I fought with the colors for king and country . . . and was disabled at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein" (U 15.794-96). He proudly mentions his father-in-law "Majorgeneral Brian Tweedy, one of Britain's fighting men who helped to win our battles" (15.779-80). In the mock trial, Bloom is referred to as "an acclimatised Britisher" (15.909). What is happening here? In the recesses of his mind, Bloom does not really know who he is.

Bloom's other identities soon surface. J. J. O'Molloy, Bloom's mock attorney, says his "native place [is] the land of the Pharaoh" (U 15.946-47): Bloom is thinking of his Jewish heritage. His desire for recognition as an Irishman flowers in the mock "Lord Mayor of Dublin" ceremony; he imagines John Howard Parnell crying, "Illustrious Bloom! Successor to my famous brother!" (15.1513-14). As Lord Mayor of Dublin, Bloom is "a credit to [his] country" (15.1538) and "a man like Ireland wants" (15.1540). Unlike Charles Stewart Parnell, he proudly shows his green socks, symbol of Ireland. Elsewhere, Bloom is described as "Leopold Bloom of no fixed abode" (15.1158).